

THE STORY OF OUR "BILLY" BUICK.

By Roy Spils

On April 5th, 1919, we purchased a Buick five passenger six cylinder touring car. During the spring and early summer of 1919, we drove over hundreds of miles of both good and bad roads through beautiful country districts in the State of Michigan. We soon learned that our Buick is a convenient vehicle for transportation. On outings, picnics or excursions of any kind, our Buick proved a most faithful "deliverer of the goods". He always took us there and brought us back safely.

After a bit, we became so attached to our Buick, that we named him "Billy" for short. The name "Billy" seemed appropriate, for "Billy" the faithful, became very popular among our friends and acquaintances, most of whom preferred to call him "Billy", so the name has stuck to our car ever since, and "Billy" by the way, has a remarkable record to his credit.

THE DRIVE TO THE NORTHWEST

On the first day of July, 1919, a Portland, Ore., manufacturing concern hired the writer as a traveling salesman to sell their particular line of machinery in California, Oregon, Washington and British Columbia; the agreement being that I use my "Billy" Buick to cover the above mentioned territory.

On July 3rd, 1919, we had "Billy's" front seat cut down so that we could use the car for sleeping purposes. We bought cooking utensils, a small stove of the canned heat variety, and the necessary equipment used by tourists for camping. On July 7th, 1919, my wife and I started out for the far northwest in our "Billy". We became proficient in making up our bed for the night in our car, that it really was more comfortable to sleep in than a berth in a Pullman.

The auto tourist is bound to learn many things from other tourists, provided he is a good mixer, ready to listen and keep his eyes open. We learned many good things from auto tourists on the road. Even though our trip was essentially a business trip, we managed to mix pleasure with business along the entire route.

In Chicago, "Billy" received his first bump. A man who had lost his wife a week previous to this (our first real accident), was driving a car of another make, and apparently lost his head, and drove his car so far to his left, that he ran pell mell into "Billy", which resulted in a badly bent front axle, putting him out of commission for a day, and incidentally spoiling a nicely planned day of fun for us in the great windy city. The man who had lost his head and consequently bumped us, paid the cost of the needed repairs to both cars. The axle was straightened and our faithful "Billy" was on his feet again the following day, ready for business.

Out of Chicago, we drove north over the famous Yellowstone trail; that great northern highway which takes one to America's wonder park and her great northwest. The trip through Wisconsin was uneventful and unmarred by incident, excepting one thing; we saw many saloons in Milwaukee with large placards in their windows telling the

public that they had real beer on draught. We figured that this procedure was rather bold since the nation had signed the "pledge". The day was dry and hot while there, and we immediately developed a thirst for the kicking liquid, and speedily satisfied our thirst. Thus it will be noted, had "Billy" Buick carried us to an oasis on a beerless desert, we found St. Paul and Minneapolis worshipping at the shrine of the "dry God" with plenty of grape juice in their thirst quenching emporiums. A drink of grape juice however, fills the bill if you are unable to secure anything better.

We sought the Buick service station at St. Paul, where a workman by name of Miller, cleaned and adjusted our "Billy's" engine so that he "sang a softer tune" while he paraded along the Yellowstone trail, through Minnesota, the Dakotas and Montana. Leaving Hotbridge, S. D., we were obliged to cross the river via ferry. A 1917 five passenger Buick car pulled out ahead of us, and I noticed that the gentleness at the wheel had the appearance of a doctor, so I referred to him as the doctor ahead in the Wisconsin Buick. His car carried a Wisconsin license plate. We were now driving over a rough piece of the road, ungraded, hilly and lumpy; the sun was burning hot, and the land we were traveling over, had the appearance of a desert, there being no growth or signs of vegetation in sight for many miles. Our cars were jumping like Jack Rabbits when being pursued. Finally the Doctor stopped his car and we pulled up just behind of him. A Buick coming from the West and Yellowstone Park, had an Indiana license, with a preacher of the gospel at the wheel. The preacher had stopped the doctor and warned him of a bad hole in the road a few rods ahead. Here stood the three Buick cars in the hot blazing sun on a desert where seed never sprouted. And what a splendid combination of Buick drivers; one a preacher, one a doctor and the other a salesman. The preacher was returning to his Indiana home. The doctor and the salesman had left their homes in Wisconsin and Michigan, to seek their fortune in the Golden West. At McLaughlin, S. D., the doctor, his family and ourselves, became fast friends, and we agreed to stick together as far as it was possible to do so under the circumstances. We found it a pleasure to travel and camp with such good people, namely, the doctor and his family. The doctor, his wife and their two little girls, were good singers. After our meal in the evening, we would sit around the camp-fire and be entertained by four well trained voices, rendering most beautiful songs. The doctor also proved to be a master in the art of handling a Buick car. He taught us a few stunts about the care and handling of our "Billy", that has meant a big saving for us.

We camped in and toured Yellowstone Park four days all told. Both our cars performed remarkably well on the stiff grades in the extremely high altitudes of beautiful Yellowstone. We also found that we could visit points of interest that were not visited by the tourist traveling via rail; consequently we saw more of nature's wonder works in the park than do those who are obliged to ride in the Yellowstone buses. We entered the park via Gardiner, or its north entrance, and left via Yellowstone or its west entrance. Both the doctor, his family and ourselves agreed, that to see what we saw of this wonder park, was well worth the price of a Buick car. The Yellowstone trail through Montana and Idaho was rough and rocky for

long stretches, and the mountain drives with its sharp turns and steep inclines, furnished thrills and rapid heart beats aplenty. We drove over wet, slippery gumbo; we skidded into ditches. We towed a fellow who had broken his differential gears, four and a half miles over narrow mountain roads to the nearest town.

Owing to the great five month's drought in eastern Montana, we had to carry a supply of water to keep our radiator filled. In the mountainous region, one is apt to run across a spring or a creek quite frequently, but even so, one should always manage to carry a gallon or more of fresh water in a water bag of some kind.

We found the native Montanans always ready and willing to lend a hand when the tourist was in difficulty. The Casol's Bump, a famous mountain drive and that rough old Fourth of July canyon in Idaho were easily negotiated by our faithful "Billy". We kept "Billy" well greased and used a high grade of oil for his crank case which we always maintained at a high level. The drive from Spokane to Seattle, was easy. Out of Spokane, we drove on the National Parks highway and then on the Evergreen trail via Vantage Ferry and Ellensburg; thence via Snoqualmie pass over the Cascade Range. The Snoqualmie pass drive is truly great for two reasons. The road is wide and well graded and is surfaced with fine crushed stone, besides being a very beautiful drive. There are hundreds of straight tall Douglas fir trees along the entire pass. From Seattle we drove to Portland in a single day over the Pacific Highway. Going to wet foggy weather and several bad detours along the route, the time - ten hours run for 218 miles was good traveling, when considering that the roads were strange to us. We had landed in Portland, the city of our headquarters and seat of future operations. "Billy's" speedometer registered 5,026 miles since we left Saginaw, Mich.

We toured the Pacific coast for over a year, eighteen months to be exact, over all kinds of roads imaginable. It is true that we had some grief and trouble. We made some bad drives, had a couple of collisions and drove into a deep ditch once, but our troubles usually occurred in or near a town. Strange to say, we have never had our trouble of any kind in bad out-of-the-way places, either on the deserts or in the mountains. "Billy" always proved true blue and faithful in a pinch.

THE DRIVE BACK EAST.

Omniscient tourist who told the story of his trip to the west coast, advised the public, "that if anybody desired to travel out west in an automobile, they should make the trip in a new car if they wished to travel in comfort and safety." We feel that this experienced tourist's advice to the traveling public, is both sound and good. A new car is bound to withstand the hard knocks and the resultant strains better on long rough trips than one can possibly expect from a much used car, but we figured that our "Billy" was good enough to go the limit across the country with any new car. It may be said here, that "Billy" proved his faithfulness and showed his metal over difficult drives, on the narrow and treacherous mountain and desert roads.

"Billy" never once betrayed our unbounded confidence in his ability to carry us back home after he had served us most faithfully over all manner of roads for two years.

On the third day of May, 1921, we left Portland, Ore., over the Pacific Highway for a tour through California and then east via Lincoln Highway. California has thousands of miles of paved highways. Besides many dirt and gravel roads in splendid shape. California beckons the tourist from every land to come hither and tour her great highways, enjoy her hospitality in her well equipped camping grounds, and behold her native beauty spots, her soil, flowers, fruits wonderful trees, parks and garden spots. In short, California is the auto tourists paradise. We spent several weeks touring California. "Billy" having an easy time carrying us from place to place.

About the first of June, 1921, we drove north to Sacramento, California, and got on the Placerville branch of the Lincoln Highway. The Placerville road is famous for the gold rush days of 1849. Many markers are still seen along this old road, which record bits of history of this or that roadhouse which flourished in those feverish days. Leaving Placerville, our "Billy" speedily climbed the summit of the Sierra Nevada mountains, fifty miles eastward, reaching an elevation on the summit of 7,630 feet above sea level. The snow still lay on the summit about two feet deep, but the snow plow had removed all snow from the path of travel. Beautiful Lake Tahoe, eleven miles from Lookout point on the summit, is plainly visible to the eye. Gigantic snow capped peaks greet the eye's gaze from this lookout point on the summit of the Sierra's. It is really an awe inspiring sight. "Billy" soon descended the grade until we reached the more level land adjacent to Lake Tahoe. Soon we arrived in the State of Nevada, and we had to say good-bye to good California roads. Again we ascended the second range of the Sierras; again we crossed the summit and descended into Carson City, the State Capital.

Carson City and Reno, are only 32 miles apart. We were surprised to see short stretches of paved roads between Carson City and Reno, and other stretches of the highway were under construction. This forced us to make some very disagreeable detours. At Reno, we paid a visit to the American Automobile Association, an organization that is a credit to America. The clerk in the 3-A. office gave us all the required information; told us that the Lincoln highway was impassable via Salt Lake, owing to the visitation of storms and subsequent floods. We were routed to travel over the Overland trail, the Ocean to Cocon highway and Pike's Peak way. We couldn't figure why this one road is burdened with three nice names, but after we had traveled over this road with its three high sounding names for several hundred miles, we came to the conclusion that it must be these three big sounding names that keep this road doing business. It is just like many of our people; we give our projects and products high sounding names because we have more faith in a name than we have in honest work. There is absolutely no good reason why this great and powerful nation cannot have at least one first class auto road across its broad and beautiful land.

At Battle Mountain, Nevada, the river had washed out the road three miles beyond its eastern limits. We were held up in this village 26 hours, during which time workmen were putting down temporary bridges over the flooded areas. Some of the drives in this flooded district were dangerous. A number of tourists came to grief; others had broken car springs, while others stuck in the mud. Our "Billy" carried us safely over all the bad places along the entire route, with neither engine nor car trouble of any kind.

We believe our car springs are as good today as they were two and a half years ago when we purchased "Billy". From Wells, Nevada, we drove via Pöbar, Nev., to Henderson, Utah. At Henderson, we learned that the salt beds had about five inches of water on them, but that it was safe to drive over these salt beds for eight miles, then we could drive our car on the Western Pacific Railroad tracks for several miles east. After this performance, we could get off the tracks, and strike the new graded road running parallel with the railroad. Now this is easier said than done. We drove from Henderson to Suldura over the watered salt beds; we drove slowly in the water, the salt underneath being white and hard as concrete. At Suldura, we got the time of train travel. We waited here to let two trains go east. Now we had quite a job on our hands getting "Billy" on the railway grade. We finally got the right wheels over the left rail and kept the left wheels on outside of the left rail. Driving on railway ties isn't smooth going, but it is at least uniform. My wife was at the wheel and I had to keep twisting and stretching my neck looking back to see if a train was coming from the west. The reader will please note that the unusually heavy rain fall out west, had flooded vast areas and made hundreds of miles of roads impassable. The Pueblo flood occurred about the time we drove on the wet salt beds, and on the Western Pacific tracks. After we had driven "Billy" about fourteen miles, on the tracks, my wife became somewhat nervous, and suggested that we attempt making the newly graded road about 200 feet from the railway. We left the tracks just in time to let the passenger train by from the east. My wife was glad to be off the tracks, but not so with me, for the car was stuck in the soft wet mud and salt between the track and new road. We worked all day to get the car out, but the soft mud was like so much grease under the wheels; chains, ropes and cables proved futile. We were now stuck on a desert where not even sage brush can grow. We saw and heard nothing save the flight of a passing train. I walked five miles to a section house at Harro station, for water. The Japanese foreman was very kind; he said that he would bring his gang of Mexicans down to where we were stuck, tomorrow morning and help put us on the road. We slept in our "Billy" bed that night soundly and peacefully on this quiet lonely desert. The next morning at eight A.M. the little Jap foreman arrived with his Mexican crew, via hand car. We started "Billy's" faithful engine; all hands pushed, and bingo! we were on the road just 120 miles from Salt Lake City, which distance we drove in about five hours. This kind Japanese gave us both food and water, and refused to accept money for his good turn. We were sure happy as we neared Salt Lake and its environs. Green trees, shrubbery, flowers and vegetation certainly looked good to us as we passed the fertile soil near the great Mormon Capitol. Salt Lake City has a large tourist camping ground with good accommodations. I made immediate

use of their hose and wash rack, and cleaned "Billy" thoroughly of his white coat of salt, as the salt brine rapidly eats and corrodes iron and steel.

Salt Lake City is a real Mecca for the tourist. We stopped there three days, and enjoyed every bit of this time. After we left Salt Lake City, we encountered more rough roads through Echo canyon and more flooded roads. At Horse Park River bridge near Granger, Wyo., many autos were stuck in the mud and water. Men and horses waded in the water, tugged and struggled all day and well into the night to get the cars out. Here our "Billy" was pulled through the water by a team of horses. East for twenty miles from Point of Rocks, the Lincoln way was very very rough, where many a car spring has met its fate. We drove slowly over this rough stretch and got over it fine. About midway along this rough piece of road, we met a big new car from New York. An elderly man was at the wheel with two ladies occupying the rear seat of this palace on wheels. The elderly lady called to my wife from her open car window and said: "May the Lord have mercy on your soul". One could tell from the expression on that lady's countenance that she wasn't enjoying her ride over this rough road a bit. We got over this rough stretch with Billy, none the worse for having carried us over it safely.

Out of Laramie, Wyo., we entered Telephone canyon. This is a steady climb to the summit, where the tourist reaches the highest point along the Lincoln Highway, namely, 8,500 feet above sea level. We reached Cheyenne, Sunday - June 12th, 1931. Camped two days in that city's splendid tourist park. Cheyenne is the capital city of Wyoming - 6,000 feet above sea level. We conversed with many tourists here who hailed from every nook and corner in the U.S.A.

We left Cheyenne over the Lincoln highway and soon drove over the State line into Nebraska, and we were glad to reach the western outpost of eastern civilization. The Platte river had flooded west areas along the Lincoln way, and we were compelled to make many detours in our path eastward.

The Lincoln way is well graded through Nebraska and Iowa. The road is built of the same material famous for its wonderful corn production. This is to our minds a bad error. The roads are very dusty in dry weather and slippery as greased lightning in wet weather. We used our extra heavy wheel chains on our rear wheels to good advantage, and our light weed chains on our front wheels helped hold "Billy" on the wet slippery roads in Nebraska and Iowa. Many tourists fear these roads in wet weather, but we feel that extra heavy chains on the rear wheels and a set of ordinary chains on the front wheels will prevent one's car from skidding. The nearer we came to civilization's eastern border, the fewer and poorer were the tourist camping grounds and accommodations. Omaha had a very poor tourist park, and might state here that we found better camp grounds in the smaller towns than we found in the larger towns in the middle west.

Bixon, Ill., is making strong efforts to please its auto touring guests.

We drove into Chicago, our old home, where our friends hospitality greeted us to make ourselves at home. "Billy" had now traveled 25,000 miles in the two years previous to his last visit to the windy city. The road between Michigan City, Ind., and Hammond, Ind., is a disgrace to the Hoosier commonwealth. It is marked 7-1 from Chicago to Michigan City. Most tourists traveling from Chicago, are routed over this rough stretch of road and personally, we feel that routing the tourist over such a poor road, is an imposition on the traveling public. Our sturdy "Billy" however had lived through many a siege while fighting to carry us over rough roads out west. This rough Indiana road did not fix on him, but we felt that we were entitled to a better road so near home. Our own Michigan roads were bad in spots, but on the whole, they furnished us a pleasant surprise.

We noted that a big change had taken place during our sojourn out west. The State of Michigan had not only greatly improved its main trunk lines, but had plainly marked each trunk line with the road number on the telegraph poles and small markers along the highways. We bought a map of Michigan in Michigan City, Ind. We found that this Rand-McNally road map corresponded in every particular with the numbered poles and markers. We commend this Michigan highway system as the best we have seen on our travels anywhere. Charlotte, Mich., is the only city we passed through in the State, that advertised its tourist camp grounds and bid the weary tourist to come and rest his tired body in that city's beautiful park.

On the 24th day of June, 1921, we arrived home, none the worse for our experience. "Billy" Buick the faithful, had remained faithful to the end, and we are more grateful than ever, for the good service he has rendered us.

E. W. SCORRING.