Quaker State sells tallow?

"Never fill the gasoline reservoir by lamplight."

Those words of caution, still good today, are to be found on page 20 of the owner's guide that came in the tool box of every 1903 Oldsmobile curved-dash runabout.

This is just one gem of advice in old-time car owner's guide books.

Several of the antique booklets were issued at a time when the horse was first being challenged as "King of the Road." It's a convincing measure of automotive progress to compare their contents with the uncomplicated break-in procedures and greatly extended periods between oil changes and other normal service shown in the modern car owner's guide.

Ranking among America's first "do-it-yourself" books, those early auto operating manuals told the buyer "how to run it" as well as "how to fix it."

For example, the proud possessor of a 1902 Cadillac chain-driver runabout was advised: "The best way to lubricate the drive chain after cleaning it is to take about four pounds of beef tallow, about one pound of flake graphite and about one pint of heavy lubricating oil, then heat and stir. When thoroughly melted and mixed, put the cleaned chain in the hot oil."

THE OPERATOR'S manual for the 1915 GMC "Model 49" truck called attention to this useful (standard equipment) feature: "Grooves are provided alongside the radiator so that pieces of cardboard may be slipped in" (to facilitate engine warm-up on cold winter mornings). This truck, incidentally, was the first GM model featuring a windshield as standard equipment and was also the first GM truck in which the driver sat on the left-hand side.

That the advent of tubless tires meant fewer worries for the motorist is borne out by this excerpt from the 1926 Pontiac owner's guide: "A tube, if carried loose in its cardboard container will be chafed through by jostling about. If carried in the tool box it is likely to be cut by sharp objects and rotted by oil or grease. Spare tubes should be wrapped in cloth or carried in tube bags. Don't hang tubes over nails in the garage. Keep them away from heat or strong light."

This note in heavy type on the front cover of the 1903 Oldsmobile runabout's manual shows it definitely pre-dated the era of enlightened customer relations. Buyers were warned: "KEEP THIS BOOK IN THE TOOL BOX. A new copy will not be furnished unless a satisfactory explanation is given."

But let's assume the owner of the 1903 curved-dash Olds dared to ignore the admonition on the cover and turned to the first section of the book. Here is where he really begins to get acquainted with his new-fangled machine, and from stern to stem.

THE MANUFACTURER opened his mechanical orientation on this rather disconcerting note: "We prefer that personal instructions be given when it is possible."

However, "Stepping up to the front of the machine we will remove the cushion and lift up the bottom of the seat, which practically exposes the whole of the inside of the machine. (See Fig. 1) etc."

Proceeding on into the maintenance section, to "Oiling," we find that in 1903, transmission gears needed "to be filled with oil about once a week, depending on the amount of use."

The operating recommendations and precautions for this pioneer Oldsmobile make some of the most interesting reading in the 73-year-old booklet:

1. "Never make a quick turn of the steering lever while the vehicle is running at a high speed, it is liable to cause a bad accident." (Tiller steering, standard equipment on this model, was very responsible.)

2. "When nearing the bottom of a hill, apply the speeder to give the motor as great a speed as possible in order to make the next hill." (On the level, the 7 h.p. single-cylinder engine made out OK.)

3. "Use emergency hand brake only in case the chain breaks, though it is well to try it occasionally to see that it is in good working order." (This is how the "Emergency Brake" got its name.)

4. "Never leave vehicle with motor running, the inevitable small boy and a slight touch of the clutch lever will cause the vehicle to leave you." (Boys will be boys, even in 1903.)

Some other "Don'ts":

"Don't take anybody's word for it that your tanks have plenty of gasoline and water and your oil-cup plenty of oil. They may be guessing."

"Don't imagine that our motor runs well on equal parts of water and gasoline. It's a mistake."

"Don't make improvements without writing the factory. We know all about many of those improvements and can advise you."

And, lastly, this very sensible bit of 1903 advice for the "break-in" period:

"Don't drive your Oldsmobile 100 miles the first day. You wouldn't drive a green horse 10 miles till you were acquainted with him. Do you know more about a gasoline motor than you do a horse?"

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