

The Days of No Gasoline Shortage

By John Rico

Friday, May 04, 1979

OUR CHANGING TRAVEL HABITS - Now with gasoline in short supply it may be wise to turn back the clock and review some of our traveling habits. Perhaps we have all become "gasaholics," and need to be reminded that the billions of gallons of gasoline we are now recklessly consuming cannot ever be replaced. It's not like a wheat crop failure in one season which can be rectified by a bumper crop in a following year. The oil we are consuming took millions of years of constant evolution to become available to us today.

Remember the day of the hay burner, more commonly called a horse? The horse and buggy was a slow mode of transportation, but problems were few with the horse, and if you kept the wheel axle well greased that buggy would go a long distance.

Many Vacaville residents (about 10 percent) fall into the age bracket where they can well remember the horse and the buggy. They have lived through the transition of horse horsepower to mechanical horsepower.

Those hardy pioneers who came West in covered wagons to find a new home on the Pacific slope, if they could have lived through our changing times, would chuckle at what we call energy problems today. I wonder just what John Wolfskill, the first American to set foot in the Vacaville-Winters area, would have said had he been greeted on arrival here by an Indian driving a Model T Ford?

Wolfskill and his brother landed in Southern California, and after having received a large land grant along Putah Creek, John Wolfskill saddled his horse, gathered 90 head of cattle, and chased them north to his new home. Today you can fly from San Francisco to Los Angeles in less than an hour Wolfskill took three months to make the trip.

When Wolfskill wanted to chat with neighbors about topics of the day, he had to again saddle that horse and ride to Napa, or to Sutter's Fort, which later became Sacramento.

Wolfskill often made the round trip in a 24-hour period. One of the problems he faced were grizzly bear, and on one return trip from Sutter's Fort he found it necessary to shoot five of the animals.

If you owned an automobile around the turn of the century, you were classified as being privileged. Gasoline was a problem in those days because there was more kerosene consumed in lamps and stoves, than there was gasoline available for those horseless carriages. The first gasoline available in Vacaville was delivered by tank wagon, owned and operated by A. M. Stevenson.

There were skeptics who saw a dim future for these new four-wheel gadgets, but as time rolled on they were to be proven wrong. Remember the chore it was to crank a cantankerous car engine; and how often you had to stop and patch a leaking fire innertube?

In the IO-year period, 1920 through 1930, it seemed as though everyone wanted to manufacture an automobile. At one time there were 8 automobile agency in Vacaville, a town of less than 1500 people.

If you planned to drive your car to San Francisco, you allotted yourself a long day. The meandering narrow asphalt road, known as Highway 40, weaved along creeks, through every town along the route. But, the longest delays were in finding a space for your vehicle aboard one of the ferry boats plying between Vallejo and the opposite shore of Carquinez Straits. Once accomplished, you drove along more thread-like roads, to Oakland, where you went through the same procedure in finding space on a ferry which would take car and passenger across San Francisco Bay.

It was a great day, May 21, 1927, when the Carquinez Bridge was dedicated and opened for vehicle travel, and it was a much greater day, November 12, 1936, when the Oakland-SF Bay Bridge put an end to those long delays at the ferry slip. There is a bit of nostalgia in reading an advertisement published back in 1888 by the Pioneer Livery Stables of Vacaville, which outlined the several scenic rides people could enjoy with horse and buggy.

You were instructed to pack a lunch, because your trip could take you out Pleasant Valley to Putnam Peak or up Miller Canyon. Or you could go up Gates Canyon, or perhaps Bassford Canyon.

And if you wanted a longer ride you could drive to Tolenas Springs in the Blue Mountains south of Vacaville, and along the route you could stop and enjoy a taste of the water from the alkali springs.

Now, in this year of 1979, we suddenly find ourselves surrounded by a gasoline shortage, despite record high prices. It is quite mysterious as to just why such a situation should prevail.

We do know that the American motorist is consuming gasoline at a record rate. We do know that we are importing oil which is costing about \$40 billions annually. We do know that refineries are working at capacity. We do know that oil companies are making record high profits. But what we do not know is just why are we in such a mess?

Fortunately, when Americans find themselves in such predicaments they always seem to find a solution. Perhaps what we are experiencing with the oil shortage may be a welcomed omen in disguise, because out of these problems may come a more permanent solution.

Do you know taht on the average the sun shines brightly 225 days each year in Vacaville - There are only about 50 days when the sun fails to make an appearance here.

The harnessing of solar power is rapidly advancing. Perhaps such power to drive a car may not be in our future, but the potential use of sun-power for other energy is in the offing.

But in the meantime, if you find gasoline to be scarce and expensive you may have to do a bit less driving.

Downloaded from the Solano History Database

<http://www.solanohistory.org/7141>

<http://articles.solanohistory.net/7141/>