

Driving Miss Daisy

It was December 1929, two months after the big stock market crash. Theodore W. Fahrney, from Hagerstown, Maryland, was still confident of his finances when he decided to buy a new 1930 Packard 7-33 seven-passenger sedan. Replete with jump seats, window curtains, braided and tasseled handholds, side-mounted spare tires, and a Tropic Aire heater, it was a fine car. Mr. Fahrney died not long after the purchase. Whether out of sentimentality or for the love of the car, it is not clearly known why, but Mrs. Fahrney kept the car until her death in the early 1950s.

The beloved Packard then went to a private museum in Hagerstown before passing through the hands of two more owners when the museum shuttered its doors. Her penultimate owner hoped to turn the car into a special events rental vehicle, but that would have required tens of thousands of dollars in modifications in order to make it legal for commercial use in Maryland. Thus, the Packard was on Ebay in March of 2008, looking for another place to call home.

Into the picture arrived Tom Wilcox. Tom is no stranger to Packards. He already owned a 1934 Super Eight coupe-roadster (which belonged to his mother since the 1950s), and would soon give his wife a 1938 1601 club coupe as a birthday gift. Enough cars for his wife to dub their home garage the Packard Paddock. The Paddock was about to become more crowded.

Tom was looking for a prewar Packard that he could use to learn the art of automobile restoration, but wanted to start with a car that didn't need a full body-off exterior and interior restoration. He saw the ad for the former museum car and thought it sounded like what he was looking for, so he flew to Hagerstown for a closer examination. It met with his approval, so in the spring of 2008 made its purchase, brought it home to Texas, and immediately named it Miss Daisy.



1930 Packard 7-33

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Seven-Passenger Sedan



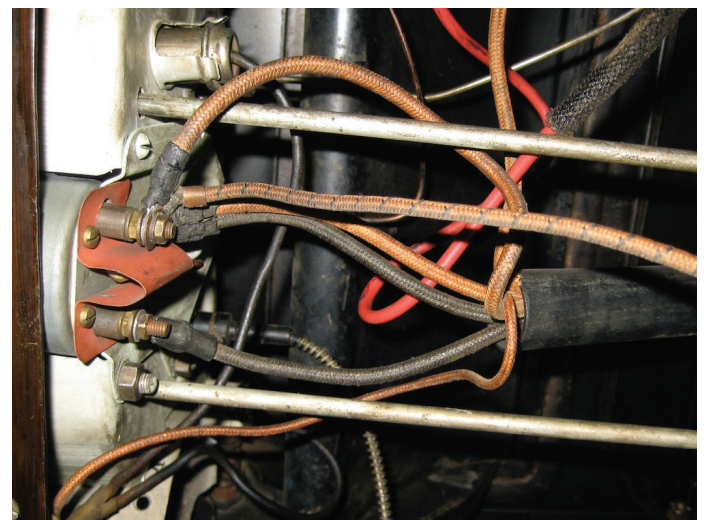
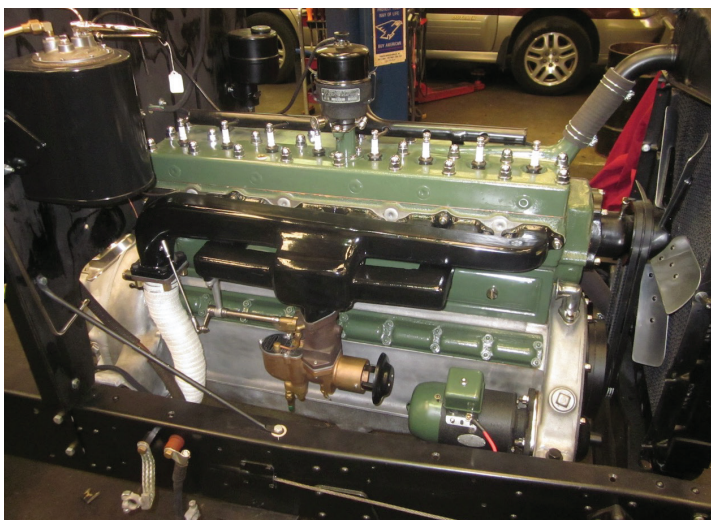
Tom began his restoration schooling with an engine tune-up, assisted by his brother, Charlie. It was a voyage of discovery. “That tune-up ended up lasting 10 years and resulted in a complete reconstruction of the car.” It turned out that the car was more worn out than he expected. The engine, suspension, transmission and brake systems were in need of major repairs, so the decision was made to do a mechanical restoration ... which led to further restoration. As Tom observed and as many before him have found out, “You find little mouse holes in the upholstery, and you realize that there’s some wood graining that doesn’t look great, and all the nickel on the handles, screws and knobs was worn, and the repaint done some time ago was not done correctly, so I thought, ‘dammit, I’m just going to go the whole mile.’”

Tom restored the chassis himself, with help from a host of friends and relatives. The engine and transmission were completely rebuilt with machining and parts provided by many vendors. Tom knew he couldn’t do the paint and body work on his own, so he convinced his friend Mike LaRocque, owner of Crossroads Vintage Restorations, that restoring Miss Daisy was the perfect project for them to do together.



“Our first goal was to restore the car using, as much as possible, the technology of 1930.” Luckily, the body had very little rust. The few dents were easy to handle with hammer and dolly; a few small areas required additional leading, and an area around the left rear door required a welded patch panel. For paint, Tom spent a year and a half just researching automotive finishes used in the 1930s. “Packard Blue was a color name used throughout Packard’s history, but the color itself kept changing. The 1930 Packard Blue was one of the early ‘metallics.’ When you look at a modern flake or metallic paint, you can see the pieces of reflective stuff that add a prismatic effect. It looks like metal, but it’s not. It’s just plastic. Early metallics had some shiny bits, but the particles were smaller and more powder like. In fact, you’d practically have to use a magnifier to even see it.”

Tom talked to dozens of folks that make paints to learn what the flake material might be. He talked to a variety of coating companies and specialists out East, but none knew for sure. After more research, Tom deduced that the flakes were nacre or mica. Nacre is commonly known as mother-of-pearl; it is the calcium carbonate layer inside many mollusk shells. “Mica is the very flaky silica mineral that’s found all over. It can be ground down and put in paint to add a sort of weird reflective effects.” Obtaining suitable mica or nacre wasn’t easy. Tom was able to find purveyors of both ground nacre and ground mica. Now all he and Mike had to do was find some way to recreate the paint.



“Once Mike and I decided on this particular approach, we just started testing the different minerals I found.” They obtained the base paint from Hibernia Auto Restoration and tried mixing in nacre and mica powders of different hues and varying coarseness. “Mike would bring it out on cards, and we would look at it.”

Mica seemed to be the best color match but the flakes were too coarse. Tom went searching for finely-ground mica similar to what would have been used in 1930. He finally found a company in the Philippines that produces super-fine powder for cosmetics. Back to the mixing bowl in the shop for another version of paint and, *voila*, success.

“I don’t have a clue if it’s a perfect match ... but it is very close. The spare tire hubs still had original paint, so we compared what we did to

what was on the hubs. It’s a little bit flashier, I think, than the original, but it’s really, really close. It was a tremendous amount of work for that paint job, but it shows because it’s gorgeous. Mike did a truly phenomenal job.” The color on this car is astounding. The paint changes from dark blue to almost black, to a light blue, depending upon the light.

The final piece in the paint puzzle was doing correct pinstripes. A 1930 Packard 7-33 body is very long from nose to tail. “Finding an artist who could put down an extremely thin 19-foot-long straight stripe that was parallel to another 19-foot-long stripe by hand was not easy.” In addition, the disc wheels required similar pinstripes, only in a perfect circle. Mike and Tom tried two local pin-stripers and they both gave up. They just couldn’t do it. “We finally found a guy named Pee-wee, who we flew in from California.”



With the beautifully restored body, engine, and chassis, Miss Daisy really deserved a wardrobe upgrade. The original upholstery and accoutrement were care-worn, moth and rodent eaten, torn, and redolent of cigarette smoke. To the rescue came Jeff Pate, of Classic Cars of Houston, and his employee, Richard. Richard's previous job was restoring interiors of Wells Fargo stage coaches, so his knowledge and experience with wool interiors was perfect for the job. "He knew how to stitch broadcloth wool and do these very intricate stitches required on that fabric. He did a beautiful job."

In 2018, the car was finally finished. "It took a lot of time. The



engine took time, just to get parts and to make it right. There are parts we had to make so that they were reproduced exactly. Plus all the chrome and nickel! There's a ton of money just in chrome and nickel plating on that car." Most would agree that all of the work, and all of the money, was well worth it.

So, about that museum car needing minimal restoration? With a wry smile Tom says, "Turns out that I'm not a very good judge of that kind of thing." However, picking a car that had never been taken apart proved to be invaluable, and the hundreds of photos that were taken during disassembly have already been shared with other Packard owners wishing to get details correct during restoration.

Miss Daisy eventually was used as the event car her previous owner imagined; she carried Tom and his bride to their wedding in 2018. His bride's vows included the observation that they shared a love of vintage horsepower: 90-horsepower of pre-World War II Packards and the one-horsepower of his wife's 35-year-old quarter horse, Rosie. The two beautiful flowers, Miss Daisy and Rosie, had a lovely time. 🚗

The restoration was made possible with the help of many skilled artists, experts and technicians from all over the country, including his brother Charlie, Mike and the team at Crossroads, Tom Rasmussen, West Peterson, David Czirr, the members of PackardInfo.com, Jeff Pate, David Mitchell, Gonzalo "Pee-Wee" Curiel, George Derryberry, and his wife, Laurie Dries.



