

A SHORT AND SLIPPERY HISTORY OF VISCIOUS FLUIDS

CONTRIBUTED BY BOB BURCHETT



After telling my friend John Sullivan the story about our recent Model T purchase, I was sure he couldn't top that...but he quickly proved me wrong with this wonderful tale. I provoked him into putting it into print so that it could be shared with all who enjoy this hobby. I am sure that you will agree that it is great to hear about these pioneers of our toys. He tells it in the "first person" and I will continue it this way.



John says: This story concerns my grandfather, George C. Sullivan who graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1903 and immediately went to work for a company called Wadhams Oil Company of Milwaukee. His job was to go out and sell "viscous fluids," which is what lubricating oil was known as in those days, to the businesses in and around Milwaukee.

As he made his rounds of local businesses, he came across some strange applications and customers. One of earliest clients included two fellows working in their garage with their new business of trying to put small motors on bicycles. He was successful in selling his viscous fluids to Mr. Harley and Mr. Davidson and they maintained this relationship for many

years. Another customer, working in his basement, was a Scandinavian chap who was trying to put a motor into a boat. My grandfather was also successful in selling his viscous fluids to Mr. Ole Evinrude. He then went across town to see another couple of guys who were trying to put small motors on lawn mowers. He did his best to sell his viscous fluids to Mr. Briggs and Mr. Stratton and was successful in this as well. There were numerous other companies in Milwaukee trying to get their businesses off the ground in those days but these stand out in his mind as the most famous and best known.

When I asked my grandfather why he didn't buy stock in those companies, he replied that there were so many guys with crazy ideas in those days it was impossible to believe that any of those contraptions would ever be successful. He was just happy to have so many outlets to sell his products. In spite of not buying stock in any of these fledgling companies, my grandfather did well enough to have owned quite a bit of real estate in the early 1920s. While he would have been considered a wealthy man in those glamorous days, during the stock market crash of 1929, he lost everything and was happy just to have a job to provide for his family.

His company, Wadhams Oil, was

eventually purchased by the Socony Oil Company. Socony was later purchased by the Vacuum Company and became the famous Socony Vacuum Company with the Flying Red Horse symbol. Socony Vacuum was later purchased by the Mobil Oil Corporation. When my grandfather retired at age 50, his pension was in the form of an annuity. It turned out that the annuity was for 40 years, which was more than adequate for most retirees. However, my grandfather lived to be 93 and for the last three years of his life, he received his pension checks from Mobil Oil directly, instead of an insurance company. My grandfather was a great man and I always enjoyed my opportunities to speak to him about his early days. His memory was excellent and he was always good for a fine story of the era.

Bob: I did some Internet research and found an image (shown above) of the last remaining Wadhams Oil Company station which is being relocated and preserved as a historical monument.

There appear to be few records of the old company, but George most likely came by this station on his rounds peddling his "viscous fluids" to the groundbreakers of our most enjoyable pastime.

Thanks John for a great story!

STANLEY ZIMMERMAN 1932-2020

Longtime CCCA member and automobile enthusiast Stanley Zimmerman of Beverly Hills passed away on July 10, 2020. Stan was born in Terra Haute, Indiana and grew up in Chicago, Illinois before his family moved to California and settled in Beverly Hills in 1947. He attended UCLA, studying finance and law and enjoyed a successful career in the home mortgage industry.

His interest in automobiles was broad, and assisted by curator Earl Rubenstein, he opened the Automobile Driving Museum in El Segundo in 2002. The name of the Museum distinguished it from other museum, as the ADM actively encouraged visitors to get close to the cars in the collection, hosting regular driving sessions with those cars.

The Southern California Region made several visits to the Museum, including a tour of the facility as part of its 2005 Grand Classic. More recently, Stan entered his 1932 Plymouth Town Car by Brewster at the 2019 Grand Classic, the only Plymouth ever granted Full Classic status.

Stan is survived by his loving wife Myrna, his son Jay, his son David and his wife Lisa, his son Thomas and his wife Kat, and his daughter Rebecca, as well as six grandchildren.