

The article below came from a magazine of the 100th anniversary of THE Co., in 1986. It is the most accurate (with my corrections) account that I have seen. If the Sears on the next page is really (1911), perhaps that was the first year of the 'short front top bows.

## The Sears Motor Buggy

*"...Run up hill and down dale—through sand, mud, snow and slush—not a racing car but powerful and reliable in severe road conditions... a car that can be left standing without running away when the band plays, or when the flies are bad, or when a train goes by, or when a newspaper blows across the street. Keep it out late at night if you like, the Humane Society won't interfere; drive it up hill as fast as you like, it won't get tired or out of wind; coast down hill as fast as you dare, it won't stumble; keep it going twenty-four hours a day if you like, it never sleeps...."*

Convincing skeptical farmers that they could get along without the horse wasn't an easy task; but much of Richard Sears' success had come

from selling rural folks mail-order buggies, and now that the automobile was coming into use his plan was to switch them over. The genial promoter was sure that he had just the machine everyone was waiting for.

By 1907 the automobile had become a fairly common sight on American roads but it was still mostly an expensive toy for the idle rich. Even the cheapest Oldsmobile model sold for \$650, and while prices were coming down as more auto makers entered the market, no one had yet brought out a car that the common man could afford. (Kiblinger cost \$250)

This led Chicago inventor Avlaro S. Krotz to sell the big mail-order firm on what he considered the perfect idea for a low-priced automobile. The Krotz plan was to take the basic buggy, modify it a bit with a piano box body, stick a motor underneath connected to a chain drive, rig up a tiller to steer with, and voila!—an automobile!

Richard Sears liked the scheme. For one thing he was always looking for "something sensational" to keep the momentum going in catalog sales. For another, he could readily visualize the new business that was sure to roll in once farmers jumped at the low priced machine that would make them the first in their neck of the woods with a real horseless buggy.

In the summer of 1908, Krotz built about a dozen prototypes for testing and to demonstrate to Sears that a reliable car could be built.

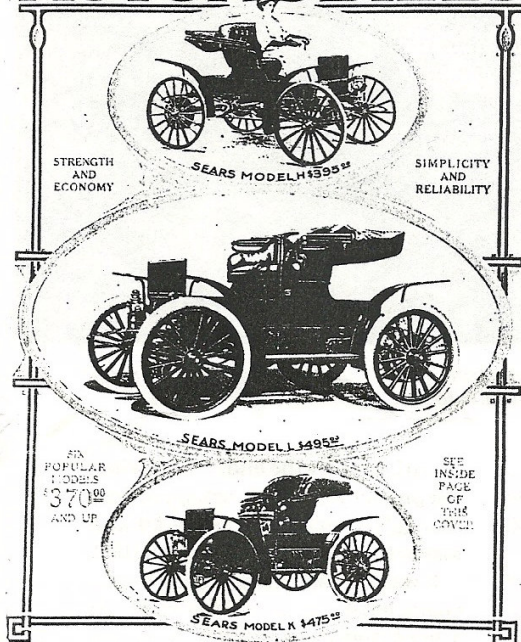
In the fall, the contract with Sears was signed.

The following spring the "Sears Motor Buggy" was road-worthy enough to be advertised in a special mail-order circular. The pages listed two basic models: one without a folding top priced at a rock-bottom \$370; and the other with top and fenders, listed at \$395. Terms were cash with the order, the customer paid the freight, and the car was shipped wheels off in a strong hickory crate.

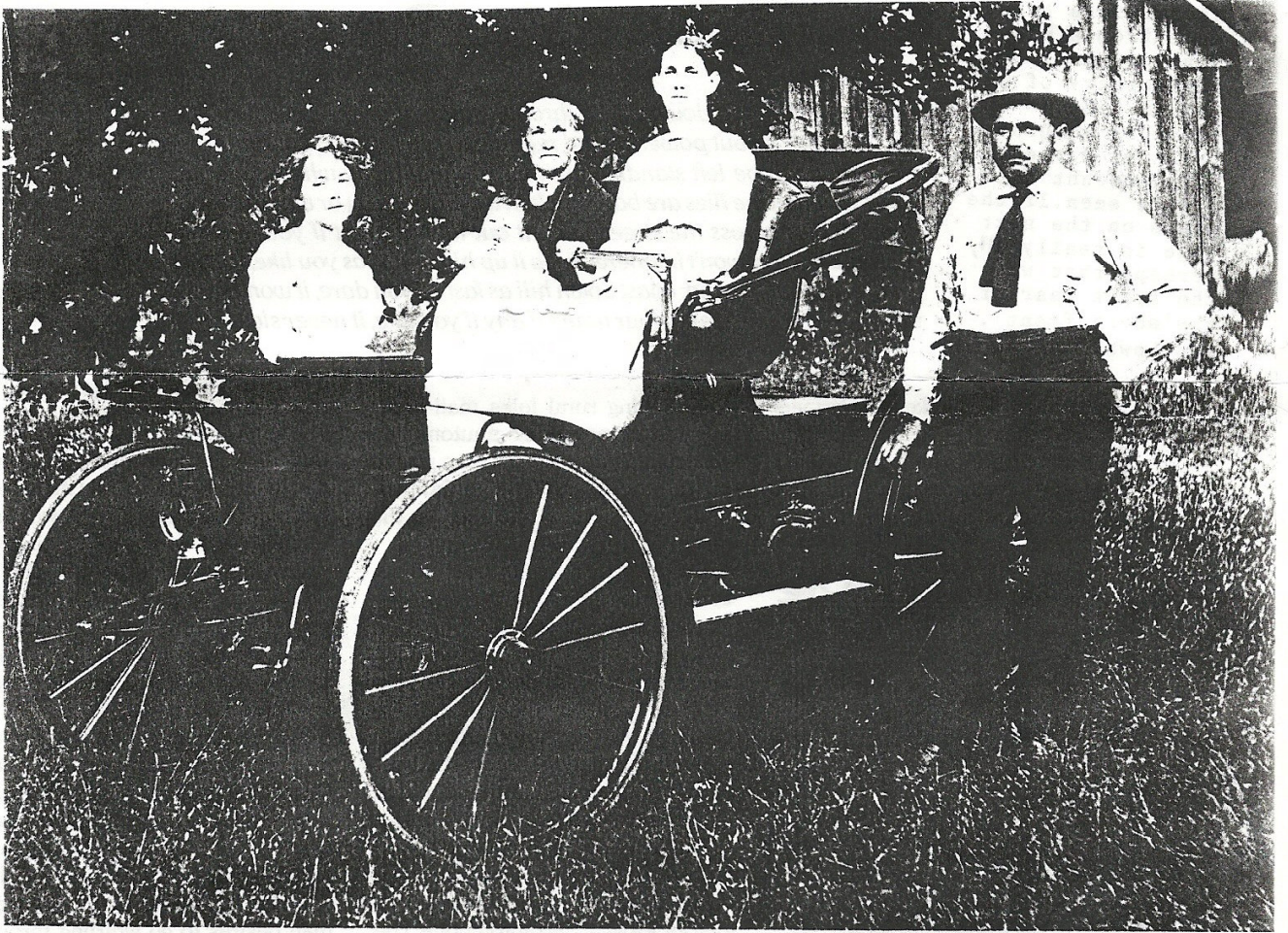
"We have not made any attempt in designing and building this Sears Motor Buggy, at copying the automobile," exclaimed the announcement when the spindly job appeared as a regular item in the 1909 Fall catalog. "We do not believe that the average man desires to go whirling through the country at 40 to 50 miles an hour." The fact was that the vehicle's top speed was a bone-rattling 25 miles an hour, and it was so much a buggy compared to any conventional motor car, it could hardly be advertised as anything more. A novel idea about five years too late, it would soon prove to be too light, too anemic, and too out-of-date to stir any real buyer interest.

Also, at precisely the same time the Sears Motor Buggy appeared on the scene, Henry Ford introduced his Model T for the masses. In contrast, it looked and operated like an automobile, was low-priced, and was so simple to fix with an occasional strand of baling wire or piece of bacon rind that it quickly won the hearts of farmers by the thousands.

## AUTOMOBILES



Three of six Sears auto models offered in the 1910 catalog. The Model "L" (center) had pneumatic tires. All the others had hard rubber tires. The engine was a 14hp 2-cylinder, air-cooled opposed. Two friction wheels brought together by stepping on a pedal put the car in motion. Drive was by double diamond side chains.



Four generations of an Oregon farm family with their new 1911 Sears Motor Buggy. Designed to "ease" the farmer away from his horse and steered by a primitive tiller, the machines were sold by Sears from 1909 to 1912.



The sales catalog described the Sears Motor Buggy as, "a perfect car for the ladies." The engine crank handle was up front.

Its rocketing popularity had a lot to do with holding sales of the Sears machines in 1909 to less than 600 total units.

In 1910 the Sears self-propelled buggy was made available in six different models and was promoted for the first time as the "Sears Automobile." A special sales catalog that year boasted that the cars were "blazing a trail from the Atlantic to the Pacific" and that they were now being driven by "doctors, farmers, ranchmen and bankers." That year Sears had a net loss of \$6,897 in the automobile

department. By the end of 1912, when the project was finally scrapped, less than 2,500 units had been sold at a loss to the company of nearly \$80,000.

It was a lesson in marketing but, in characteristic fashion, Sears had seen a need and tried to fill it. In failing with a car manufactured by the company the foundation had been laid, however, for a whole new section in the catalog devoted to the parts and accessory needs of the now booming automobile craze—a move that would put Sears, Roebuck at the vanguard of this field for years to come.

In the top photo (can you tell its a model K?) note how front top bow is attached, and where nickle ends on tiller shaft.

SEARS MOTOR BUGGY FRICTION MATERIAL REPLACEMENT

I only recently obtained my Sears Buggy from California, as part of a private collection of motor vehicles, it had been unused for many years, and when it was running it was not going well, so when it finally arrived I proceeded to carefully dismantle and check all components.

I removed the body and the wheels, as both needed some work, this gave me a clear view of the frame. I could see, among other things, that the friction material needed to be replaced. Mr. William Whitner, was listed in the SEARSHEET as a replacement source for suitable material so I contacted him and had him send some to me. It is easier to replace this fabric with the body off the frame of course, but it is not essential, and the steps I have taken can be achieved with the body in place.

As instructions are not in the Sears Instruction Book I will explain the steps I took to fit this new material. All of the work is carried out on the drivers side of the machine.

- \* Remove the chain, this could remain in place around the wheel, but the drive sprocket must be clear.
- \* Remove the cotter pin from the pull rod and slip pull rod off shaft.
- \* Remove nuts from the end of the pull rod with spring, washer and spacer, now the pull rod can be slid forward and removed.
- \* The bell crank is pivoted from a bracket attached to the rear frame crossmember, remove the nuts from under the bell crack and it will drop down, at the same time it will slide ... backward out of the yoke which moves the friction wheel along the cross shaft.
- \* Support the cross shaft just behind the clutch, so that when the "swing" pin is removed the shaft does not drop.
- \* Remove the cotter from the "swing" pin which supports the cross shaft, and tap out. Allow the cross shaft to be lowered a small amount, this will enable you to remove the old discs over the top of the clutch.

You now have clear access to the friction wheel, simply remove the bolts holding the wheel and discs together, and as each one comes free lift over the clutch to remove. I marked separately each new discs before punching holes for the bolts, but if the new discs could be held in a jig all of them could be cut at the same time.

I had to trim a small amount off the new discs using a coarse wood rasp, before there was clearance from the flywheel, I do not know if this would be required for each vehicle.

After fitting the new discs I reassembled all the components and made adjustment following the Sears handbook, para 28, page 16/17.

I trust this information may be of help to other owners, if I have missed any steps it will be apparent when the job is under way. Peter May of Australia.

H E R S H E Y

My new vendor spaces were at the back(north) of the White Field about fifty yards from where the pavement turned to impassible mud. However, I was advised by neighboring vendors that If I got up early enough friday before other vendors arrived with their cars, I could maneuver the Sears across three aisles to where there was pavement. So I only had to be pushed half of the way where there was a slight up grade by 3 or 4 willing helpers. None of the other fields except the Chocolate Field Annex have pavement. Next year I'll ask for spaces adjoining the pavement, which I've already surveyed. When word came over the loud speaker that highwheelers could now come over to the Stadium area, I had a most enjoyable half mile drive thru the White Field, west on Hershey Park Drive, and south on the wide one way road which the show cars use on saturday. I was soon joined there by Loy Zimmerman in his mostly original condition # 1107. Gordon Martin who has raced there several years came there too. There was quite a crowd of onlookers. We were not allowed thru the gates like last year until they were ready to have the first of our heat races. At least half the stands were full. When I pulled alongside Loy to the starting line, I unfortunately forgot to lower my top. So though I left the starting line before him, Loy soon overtook me while my top was effectively slowing me down with its wind resistance. In the final contest, the International finally caught up and passed Loy at about three quarters around the track. The crown roared and stood on their feet. Next year I'm pretty sure there will be at least one Holsman racing as its owner was asking me advice on how to secure his car to his trailer. I shall write the woman from NH to come who had entered 2 Holsmans a few years ago but never came. Right after the other race cars were tested, the start of the Centennial show began on the newly enlarged area at the north end of the track. Loy represented 1909 and I was for 1910. We parked our cars hub to hub so that my tarp would cover both cars. All the Centennial cars were allowed to park in the Stadium overnight, which was locked, and remain there until 2 PM saturday. As a result, I forgot about the Sears meeting friday.

In a few days I will have drawings from Peter May of Australia of how to modify the wheel bearing of an available Holden auto to fit any Sears for a few bucks! Or would anyone rather have a NOS Timken cone I bought for \$106, plus

My 'sickness' delayed this issue. Another is planned .

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*Merry Christmas*



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