

The Chalmers Automobile Newsletter

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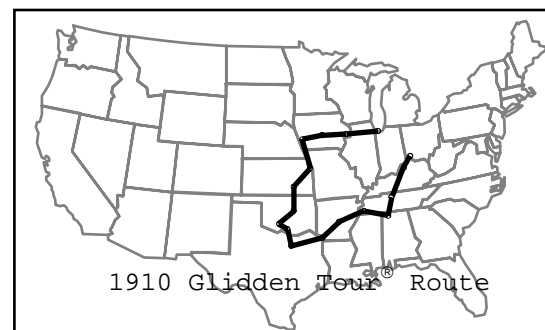
Here is a story from the past about "Number 5", the Chalmers "30" that won the Glidden Trophy in 1910. I excerpted most of this story from "The Chalmers Owner" magazine which was published by the Chalmers Motor Company in the early 1900's. Harry Ermoian (#46) sent me copies of the magazine which he obtained from the National Automotive History Collection at the Detroit Public Library. Other automotive historical sources were also utilized including copyrighted and trademarked items used with the permission of the Veteran Motor Car Club of America.

THE CHAMPION CHALMERS

Glidden Tours®, which began in 1904, were sponsored by the American Automobile Association (AAA). The early events were for AAA members who enjoyed the challenge of long distance motoring. Later, the tours became dominated by car manufacturer interests because of the marketing and sales publicity generated from winning the tour. Paved roads in the early 1900's were few and far between. The first concrete highway in the nation was laid in 1908, at that time Kansas had 273 miles of macadam and gravel roads; Delaware had 66; Nebraska, 23; and Oklahoma had none. Where there were no roads (including crude wagon paths), the tour drivers had to improvise with railroad tracks, canal towpaths, stream beds, etc. Wear and tear from the rigors of this kind of long distance travel resulted in many breakdowns. Inspectors, who were considered to be technical experts, microscopically examined each car at designated inspection stops. Penalty points were given for any failure or defect found. At the end of the tour, penalty points were added up and the car with the fewest points was the winner.

What makes the 1910 Glidden Tour® noteworthy was the adoption of a new set of rules and the controversy involving the winning car. The new rules were designed to overcome a concern that in previous years the scoring system often resulted in many perfect scores, and no clear-cut winner was determined. Factory teams, who wanted the accolades all to themselves, were particularly concerned about this. An explanation of the controversial win is left for the end of this article.

The 1910 Glidden was 2,851 miles in length (the longest endurance run at that time) and it took 16 running days to complete. This was an extremely difficult tour, which resulted in no perfect scores. The tour started in Cincinnati and ended in Chicago with an intermediate stop in Dallas Texas! Average distance traveled per day was 178 miles and the longest distance day was 242 miles.



The contest began on June 14th with 18 cars participating. By the second day the cars were being tortured by the cobble stones of the old military road known as the Louisville-Nashville Pike. Some of the exposed cobble stones were reported to be nearly a foot high. This rough road produced the first penalties for many of the contestants, but not for "Number 5" piloted by the Chalmers factory driver William Bolger. Following Nashville, stops were made in Sheffield (AL) and Memphis. This part of the route was relatively easy. The cars tackled steep grades, forded creeks, and traveled along gooey river bottoms.

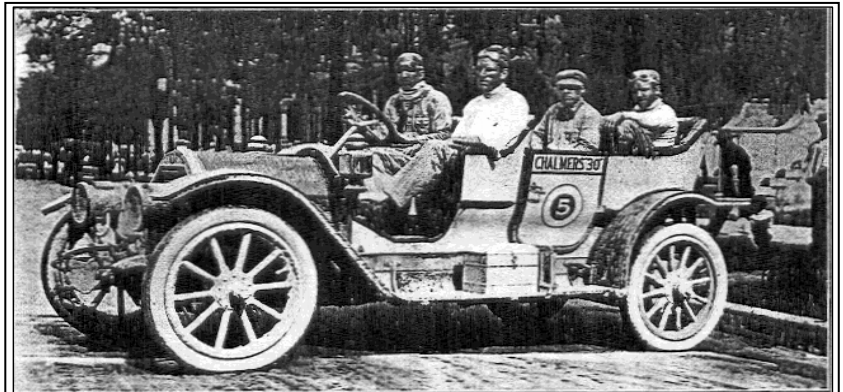
Continuing Southward into Arkansas and along the Mississippi River and then the White and the Red Rivers, the drivers encountered more challenging conditions which included wash-outs, stump-strewn roads and deep sandy stretches. Overnight stops in Little Rock and Texarkana were made before transiting the Texas prairie roads into the city of Dallas.

By the time the cars reached Dallas, many of them were so beaten up that they were damaged beyond repair. Only two or three had any reasonable chance of continuing. Bolger's "Number 5" however, was the only car to reach Dallas with a perfect score! The next leg of the tour continued through Terral (OK) with a stop in Lawton (OK). This leg was predicted to be particularly tough on both driver and car. Local Dallas enthusiasts wagered ten to one odds that the then favorite "Number 5" could not uphold that perfect mark after the next inspection stop. Daytime temperatures soared to 110^o F which was typical for the Texas/Oklahoma border during the summer. The few roads that existed were very rough and where there were no roads, the roadbed of the Rock Island Railway became the designated route. Long stretches of the railbed had to be traversed; it also provided a means to cross the Red River into Oklahoma. Traveling over the rail right-of-way must have been a piece of cake compared to everything else; even considering that the rail ties caused numerous flat tires.

"Number 5" surprised everyone when Bolger arrived in Terral for the mid day inspection. The Chalmers "30" still had a perfect score and it continued on to an overnight stop in Lawton. Next came Oklahoma City and Wichita, and at the Wichita inspection the first penalty points for "Number 5" were inflicted. Three penalty points were earned for tightening a fender bolt. Now in the home stretch, the cars made stops in Kansas City, Omaha, Des Moines, Davenport and finally Chicago.

Final inspection in Chicago initially awarded the fewest penalty points to a Premier. However, the Chalmers crew protested the score based on a non-stock detail of the Premier's lubrication system. The protest was upheld and "Number 5" was declared the winner. Inspectors found that the brakes on the Chalmers "30" could still stop the car within the required 50 feet. They penalized "Number 5" for loose shackles and body bolts, and a broken fender iron. The second place Premier was a 6-cylinder, 60 H.P. car which cost more than twice the 4-cylinder, 30 H.P. Chalmers "30".

The Glidden Tour® was considered the classic of all endurance contests and this win by "Number 5" was the first for an automobile in the \$1,500 medium-price range. This set a new precedent in the eyes of automobile buyers who previously believed that only more expensive cars gave good reliability. Chalmers profited from this demonstration of affordable reliability.



Victorious "Number 5" and happy crew

A lesser known story about the Glidden Tour® series concerns the pathfinder and pilot cars. In the spring before each endurance run, the official route was driven and laid out by a pathfinder car. This car blazes the trail to be taken by the contestants the following summer. Also, on the first day of the endurance run, a pilot car is sent out ahead of the competing cars. The purpose of the pilot car is to clear the way and guide competing cars that follow. For the 1910 Glidden Tour®, the AAA designated a Chalmers "30" as the pathfinder car and this was the same car as the "Number 5" that later participated in and won the tour. A Chalmers "30" was also designated as the pilot car. This makes one wonder if the first place finish by "Number 5" reflects the famous marketing genius of Chalmers by "blazing the trail and piloting the path" for this Chalmers feat.

According to Chuck Fanucci (#45), the Chalmers "30" won more motoring contests in proportion to the number entered than any other car, regardless of price. It has never been defeated in any motoring contest by any car in the same power and price class. The Chalmers "30" was a true Champion Car.

Dave Soper (#34) has been trying to obtain a copy of the 1910 Glidden Tour® medallion. This was a commemorative medallion mounted on the dash or coil box of the 1910 Chalmers "30". If anyone can help, please contact him at the address listed in the membership list.

That's all for now; hope you enjoyed this story from the past. Send me your questions, comments or other information for the next newsletter.

Dave Hammond