

THE ROLLING MUSEUM

Peter Findlay photo

By David Morrison

“As the horsepower in modern automobiles steadily rises, the congestion of traffic steadily lowers the possible speed of your car. This is known as Progress.”

~ Sydney J. Harris (1917-1986)

I was absolutely horrified when I first read about cars with self-parking technology. While admitting to Luddite tendencies I will happily embrace any new development of worth, but is this not technology for technology’s sake? I feel that such innovations, automotive or otherwise, those designed for our “convenience,” serve only to make us lazier. This one apparently negates the need for hands, as the driver does not need to touch the steering wheel at all as the car backs into a parking space. In the process these inventions considerably lessen or entirely remove the joy of interaction – in this instance the pleasure to be had from driving – therefore further disengaging us from the real world. This is not a good thing.

According to friends’ opinions I appear in the minority in this respect, so it is always a pleasure to encounter someone whose sentiments, even to a small degree, mirror my own. Peter Findlay, President of the Vintage Car Club of Canada’s (VCCC) Antique (pre-1915) Chapter, knows what I am talking about. A schoolteacher with a passion for beautiful old vehicles, ones with which drivers can fully interact and engage,

he does not even own a cell phone. “I don’t need all those gadgets and the things in my life they tell me I should have,” he says, to rapturous applause from my direction.

“You can connect to machines like these cars in a way you can’t connect to a gadget, to a technology of the current state,” continues Findlay. “With my car I can see things move, I can hear them, I can adjust them, and I can make them act differently. I need to understand my car on that level. Driving one of these vehicles, or just being around it, is not like anything else. It is a fascinating piece of mechanical technology.”

Between June 23 and 26 the VCCC’s Antique Chapter will be based in Parksville and touring the area for three days. “It’s a huge opportunity for the public to see how automobiles have evolved in a hundred years,” says Findlay, who as a teacher is naturally interested in the educational opportunities offered by these vehicular classics. He terms the VCCC a “rolling museum,” one promoting not only an appreciation of the design aesthetics and mechanical ingenuity of yesteryear, but providing a look at the parallels between antiquated propulsion systems and the green technologies of today.

“One of the cars we have is a steam car,” he explains, “so that takes you into the area of alternative forms of transportation and energy. In that era there were also electric cars, and even hybrid kind of cars that would run on both electricity and gas. Connecting that with what’s going on now is fascinating.”

The roots of the VCCC lie in Vancouver almost seven decades ago, but it was not until 1958 that a proper club began to take shape. A gentleman by the delightfully contradictorily futuristic name of Buck Rogers placed an ad in the *Vancouver Sun*, inviting fellow old car enthusiasts to a meeting. Today there are 24 chapters boasting around 1,200 members who are proud owners of an estimated 2,500-3,000 vintage vehicles between them. The club’s website proudly states that its “main reason for existence is to share with as many other ‘old car enthusiasts’ as possible the joy of preserving and enjoying our precious historic vehicles.” Looking at the numbers

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above, I would say it has been quite a success so far, wouldn't you?

It is very easy to understand the passion VCCC members have for their vehicles. As a layperson all you really need to do is look at them to get it. They are elegance exemplified. But their easiness on the eye aside, it must be such a joy driving one of these cars. It is the magic of this experience that has Findlay for one utterly hooked, yet the enthusiasm for vintage automobiles, that now sees him as the Antique Chapter's President, comes as no great surprise when learning of an extraordinary, epic journey he took 14 years ago.

"My father was a member of the VCCC when I was a very young child, so I guess I was born into this," he tells me. "He's always had an interest in old vehicles and is still active in our club with his 1912 REO. So I grew up driving these things and developed a passion for them as I learned more about them. *But* my real turning point came in 1997 when I accompanied my father on a cross-Canada trip – from Halifax to Victoria – in the 1912 REO. The reason for this was that my dad's car is identical to the one that first drove across Canada, and he being a real enthusiast for Canadian transportation history had researched the whole journey and decided it

would be his retirement trip. We traced the trip to the day and to the route, as close as we could, to the original journey."

The original journey to which Findlay refers was taken 85 years prior by freelance writer Thomas Wilby and his driver-mechanic, Jack Haney. (Freelance writer, huh? Hmmm... this gives me an idea! Anyone fancy a road trip?) Bearing in mind the 1912 REO travels at an average speed of just 30 MPH, it took Wilby and Haney just 49 days to cross the country. The former recorded the adventure in a book, the unsurprisingly titled *A Motor Tour Through Canada*, while Findlay's account of the journey with his father can be found online at www.antique.vccc.com/autotour.

Despite the huge distance travelled, I like the simplistic way in which Findlay sums up the satisfaction of traversing the country, or in fact going anywhere, in such a vehicle: "You enjoy the world and nature a whole lot differently at a lower speed, with no windows. You feel so much *closer*."

Of the VCCC Antique Chapter's June Tour of Parksville, Findlay says: "We'll be based out of Tigh-Na-Mara (1155 Resort Drive) for three nights – Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Each day we will be out on a tour somewhere for 80-100 miles. We are definitely a touring group; our cars are not display cars and not necessarily gleaming all the time, but they're all drivable cars. That's our goal – to get out there and use them."

Nonetheless, the general public is encouraged to join in the fun by viewing the touring cars at Tigh-Na-Mara from approximately 4pm on each of the days, and also cheering them on as they make their way around the area. With such low average speeds the cars will of course only be travelling on back roads, so keep an eye out for them anywhere from Coombs to the Comox Valley.

And wherever they go, the drivers will be fully engaged, joyously interacting with their lovely machines, just like it was in the good old days... ~

For more information about the Vintage Car Club of Canada's Antique Chapter and their June Tour of Parksville, please visit <http://antique.vccc.com>. For more general information about the VCCC and its activities, please visit www.vccc.com.

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