MEDIA PACK

“Wartime Conservation and the Gasoline Crisis”

Christopher Robert Megaffin
Wildwood School

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blinds those proceeding in the opposite direction as to practically paralyze traffic. This is also true of the large searchlights commonly used on motor trucks. In each of these instances a failure to carry lights upon the vehicle in the customary manner is illegal, for the reason that the law requires an illumination sufficient to reveal substantial objects not only the required distance ahead, but ten feet on either side of the machine at a point ten feet in front.

Under the strict wording of Section 13 of the Vehicle Act as amended in 1917, spotlights are not allowed for the reason that the beam of reflected light may be raised from the driver’s seat above the forty-two inch level. But the Motor Vehicle Department has authorized their use in connection with an adjustment which prevents the raising of the beam of light above the prescribed level. Inasmuch as this level is spoken of in connection with lights projected on the road ahead, the spotlight may probably be used upon the side of the road to read guideposts or for other similar purposes.

The most striking change which has been made in the provisions of the Motor Vehicle Act concerning lights is that which allows the beam of reflected light to remain forty-two inches above the level of the street at a point seventy-five feet ahead. Formerly the center rays from headlights were required to strike the ground at this distance, so that the practical result of the change is that they may now be raised three and one-half feet higher than formerly. No dimming device is required. The question then is whether the rays from headlights are now permitted to be elevated higher than is consistent with public safety. One answer is that our law as it now stands is identical with that of many of the Eastern States. With our superb system of good roads and highways in California, it is probable that pleasure traffic is greater here than elsewhere. It will probably be here that the problem will be solved, but the solution is with the lawmakers. Most drivers will adjust their headlights as liberally to themselves as the law allows and it will be difficult to induce any considerable number of them to do otherwise.

Many anti-glare devices are on the market, some of which have been endorsed by local authorities. These have, in some instances, rendered the users immune from arrest, but have not been so satisfactory to others using the highways. The predilection is ventured that the next Legislature will lower the forty-two inch level and re-enact the dimmer law in a modified form.

ALL STATES OF UNION NOW SHARE FEDERAL ROAD AID

ALL the States of the Union have availed themselves of the opportunity of participating in the benefits of the Federal Aid Road Act, which appropriated 75 million dollars for the construction of post roads and 10 million dollars for forest roads, according to the report of the Director of the Office of Public Roads and Rural Engineering, United States Department of Agriculture. That the passage of the act has stimulated road building is shown by the fact that in 1916 there were approximately 41 million dollars of State funds expended for all highway purposes, and it is estimated that in the calendar year 1917 the aggregate expenditures of State funds for this purpose will be at least 60 millions. A number of the States have made specific appropriations to meet Federal aid dollar for dollar. Among these are New York, Illinois, Michigan, Rhode Island, Nevada, Iowa, Florida and Vermont.

AMPLE GASOLINE FOR USE BUT NONE TO WASTE

THERE is plenty of gasoline for all purposes, both peace and war, but none to waste, according to Motor Age. Figures compiled recently suggest that 1,500,000 gallons can be saved daily by attention to the following items (there are seven of them and four lie within the province of the individual motorist):

Tank wagon losses, 7,200 gallons; leaky carburetors, average one-seventeenth pint a car, 20,400 gallons; poorly adjusted carburetors, one-half pint a car, 240,000; engines running idle, one-quarter pint a car, 150,000; wasted in garages, 10 pints a day, 67,000; saved by using kerosene in garages, 106,000; needless use of passenger cars, 1/4 pint a car, 897,000 gallons.

Savings of 1,000,000 gallons will provide for the Army and Navy, including airplanes, which require the highest grade of gasoline. The following suggestions will be widely distributed through the country in the form of posters in garages, newspaper notices, and the like:

Save the Gasoline.

1. Store gasoline in underground steel tanks. Use wheeled steel tanks with measuring pump and hose. They prevent loss by fire, evaporation, and spilling.
2. Don’t spill or expose gasoline to air; it evaporates rapidly and is dangerous.
3. Don’t use gasoline for cleaning and washing; use kerosene or other materials to cut grease.
4. Stop all gasoline leakages. Form habit of shutting off gas at tank or feed pipe.
5. Adjust brake bands so they do not drag. See that all bearings run freely.
6. Don’t let engine run when car is standing. It is good for starter battery to be used frequently.
7. Have carburetors adjusted at service stations of carbureter or motor-car companies; they will make ordinary adjustments without charge.
8. Keep needle valve clean and adjust carbureter (while engine is hot) to use lean mixture as possible. A rich mixture fouls the engine and is wasteful.
No shortage exists of the petroleum supply for the immediate needs of the country... The sales priority list has been established, not because of shortage of gasoline, but only because of limited means of transportation to supply all consumers.

If we were running a radio quiz show we would be tempted to hold out the question "who said that?" as our super-stumper, for we are willing to wager that not one in a million could give the correct answer. No, it wasn't a statement issued by Donald Nelson, Leon Henderson, or Harold Ickes. It isn't even a quotation of recent vintage. The above words were those of Mark L. Requa, director of the oil division of the United States Fuel Administration of World War I, and they appeared in the New York Times of March 31, 1918.

They were the opening barrage in a gasoline conservation program which ultimately resulted in "gasless" Sundays in all States east of the Mississippi River.

A study of the files of the leading newspapers of the nation in 1918 reveals an amazing parallel to the problems facing American motorists today—up to a point. The situation leading to gasoline curtailment, the statements made by government officials were identical with those of 1942. It was in the method of handling the situation that the parallel stops. Back in 1918 the government found the solution to the problem; 1942 officials is floundering—it has ignored a valuable lesson learned 22 years ago. But we're getting ahead of our story. Let's take a look into the past and see where history has repeated and has failed to repeat itself.

Mark Requa's statement in March of 1918 was occasioned by growing gasoline shortages in the East due to war shipments to England and an over-burdened transportation system. Rationing had not been instituted and it was not until the pressure of summer gasoline sales in August that the Petroleum Administration sent out hints of future curtailment.

Late in August, 1918, low gasoline stocks made it imperative that something be done, but before taking any harsh disciplinary measures those in charge wisely decided to give the American public an opportunity to show its patriotism. They called for voluntary "gasless" Sundays east of the Mississippi and Mark Requa explained the need in these words:

"There is plenty of gasoline for automobile use if rationally and sensibly used. There will not be enough if the automobile user continues to waste it. If the consumer will exercise care against waste it will avert the necessity of drastic government action."

Sunday, September 1, was set as the date for the first "gasless" Sabbath. The results? Here's how the New York Times reported the story on September 2:

"The public response was remarkable on the first day the new ruling was in effect. Those owners who would not cooperate were met and challenged on the streets by volunteer vigilance committees who organized on their own volition to keep their sections of road and highway traffic clear on this and all following Sundays. The effect was sufficient on uncaring and slack citizens who intended to drive as usual. They hastily changed their plans.

"All traffic was cut to barely a few cars where on other Sundays there had been thousands. The public cooperated with good spirit and zest in this inauguration of motorless Sundays. The saving of gasoline by checking the sales reports of major service companies showed a remarkable number of thousands of gallons of gas unsold."

The following day the Times editorial writer took occasion to commend the public and to decry the "brazen wretches" who took joy rides, few though they were.

Everywhere the response was the same. American motorists proved their patriotism. At the close of the second Sunday, the editorial writer of the New York Times struck the keynote in his analysis of the American public when he declared:

Gasless Days ARE HERE AGAIN

By WILLIAM K. BAXTER
Patriotic motorists solved the fuel shortage problem of World War I with voluntary gasless Sundays. Today Washington might well profit from a lesson learned in 1918.

"A power greater than law is the power of public approval when moved of its own volition to act upon a suggestion or a request, as is shown by observance of the public on the gas conservation request; the explanation being that the request was reasonable, fully explained to the public and thoroughly understood and approved. They responded with eager patriotism and good grace."

To which the modern motorist can only add, "Washington papers please copy."

The widespread success of voluntary rationing led Director Requa to predict that the need for "gasless" Sundays would be ended by mid-October. He told the public on September 29 that its compliance had resulted in 10 cargo boats, each carrying 50,000 barrels of gasoline, being sent to France. True to his prediction the ban on Sunday driving was lifted on October 17 and the government told the people:

"The request will be renewed only if the supply falls dangerously low. Through the loyal and voluntary response of the people the total of 1,000,000 barrels of gasoline was saved for the military forces. This would equal 50,000,000 gallons."

That's the story on "gasless" Sundays in the East during World War I and it proved what could be accomplished through a government request which was reasonable, fully explained and thoroughly understood by the public.

California and the other States west of the Mississippi were not included in the voluntary rationing program as ample gasoline stocks were available. No concerted conservation drive was made until the Automobile Club of Southern California appealed to California motorists to voluntarily reduce their pleasure driving so as to avert the necessity of government rationing. S. L. Mitchell made such an appeal on October 13, 1918, which was printed in the Los Angeles Times.

"From the information that I have received from the Fuel Administration," Mr. Mitchell declared, "I believe it is safe to say that if the people will do their part toward the saving of gasoline and reduce useless mileage to a minimum, the use of gasoline on Sunday can be continued on the Pacific Coast and in Southern California. However, the only thing that will prevent this curtailment is the absolute prevention of all waste. This statement is not a warning but a piece of friendly advice to motorists at large."

Compare this statement with the conclusion of Mr. Mitchell's plea for the elimination of all unessential driving in keeping with the Club's "Drive For Victory!" program which appeared in last month's WESTWAYS:

"All of the foregoing is pretty plain talk and a solemn warning from one motorist of long experience to the entire motoring fraternity. We face the stern reality that the present problem is not whether we shall have motoring as usual but whether we shall have motoring at all."

Yes, history does repeat itself. We recommend a reading of the history of World War I gasoline rationing to those officials in whose hands it is entrusted today. There's a lesson to be learned from the pages of the past. American motorists have proven their right to be trusted. To a man they can say, "We've done it before, and we can do it again!"