

# The Woman And The Car

## A Chatty Little Handbook for Edwardian Motoriste

by Lynne Bellusico

“The Woman and the Car – A Chatty Little Handbook for the Edwardian Motoriste”

On our recent trip to Pittsburgh, I found an interesting book at the museum shop at the Frick Museum. They have a nice collection of carriages and early automobiles, and this reprint of a 1909 book, gives advice to the “Edwardian Motoriste.” It was written by Dorothy Levitt and she shared many ideas for the female driver. Since our 1908 Cadillac was purchased and driven by a woman, I thought we needed to have a copy in our library.

Dorothy Levitt was the “premier woman motorist and botorist of the world.” (I checked “botorist” and discovered that it was a word to describe people who drive motorized boats.) She raced cars in England, France and Germany. The chapters in her book include the upkeep and cost of accessories; what to wear; understanding the mechanics of the car; how to drive them; motor manners; a woman’s guide to technical terms; and comments of various makes of automobiles. Here are some excerpts from “The Woman and the Car – A chatty Little Handbook for the Edwardian Motoriste”:

“We now come to the various levers and their different functions.

There are six levers, the change-speed, or gear lever, on the left-hand side of the steering-column, under the steering wheel; the ignition-lever and the air-lever, both to be found under the steering wheel on the right-hand side of the steering column; the hand throttle, underneath the steering wheel; in centre of column, on a small ratchet, the hand-brake lever and the first-speed lever.”

“If you are driving in a very hilly or mountainous country, you must give the engine a charge of oil more frequently than every twenty miles on account of its having to be on low gear, when the engine runs much faster and is liable to get over-heated and it is does become over heated you will soon notice a nasty “knock” regarding which I will explain in a later chapter on “Troubles.”

“You will find room for gloves in the little drawer under the seat of the car. This little drawer is the secret of the dainty motorist. What you put into it depends on your tastes, but the following articles are what I advise you to have in its recesses. A pair of clean gloves, an extra handkerchief, clean veil, powder puff (unless you despise them,) hair-pins, and ordinary pins, a hand mirror, and some chocolates are very soothing sometimes!”



“The mirror should be fairly large to be really useful, and it is better to have one with a long handle to it. Just before starting, take the glass out of the little drawer and put it into the little flap pocket of the car. You will find it useful to have it handy – not for strictly personal use, but to occasionally to hold up to see what is behind you. Sometimes you will wonder if you heard a car behind you, and while the necessity or inclination is to look round is rare, you can, with the mirror, see in a flash what is in the rear without losing your forward way - - - “

“Another outlay is to be found in tips. The men at a garage are always hungry for tips and your car will be polished with greater zest if the tips are frequent or generous. The advertisement of a “no tip” garage is a fallacy. The proprietor may consider this principle the right one, but if you act according to his idea, your car will probably suffer.”

“Some hotels and wayside inns now days clean cars which stop with them overnight without extra charge, yet the fee they charge for the garage really covers this. “

“Twenty or thirty years ago, two of the essentials to a motorist – some acquaintance with mechanics and the ability to understand local topography - were supposed to be beyond the capacity of a woman’s brain. The supposition was simply due to the fact that woman’s brain had never had occasion to approach these subjects. Fifty years ago a satirical writer – a man, of course – averred that although instructions in the use of the globes was part of the curriculum of every girls school, no woman could understand, or would try to understand a road map. . . indeed, the average woman is probably quicker than the average man in gathering from a map the information it has to offer,”

“If you are going to drive alone in the highways and byways it might be advisable to carry a small revolver. I have an automatic “Colt” and find it very easy to handle as there is practically no recoil – a great consideration to a woman. I may add, I practice continually at a range to keep my hand and eye in, it is none the less a comfort to know that should the occasion arise I have the means to defend myself.”

