

## Historical Ads Vaunt Short-Lived Steam Car

WENDI A. MALONEY

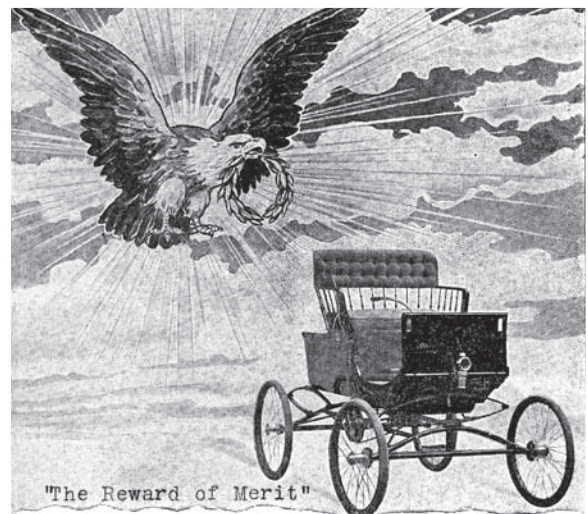
On January 25, 1900, the Washington, D.C., post office tested a new way to deliver mail: it used a vehicle called the Locomobile. The experiment succeeded, cutting the time of collection and delivery to “considerably less than half the usual limit,” reported the *Evening Times* of Washington. “The Locomobile is a steam-power machine,” the newspaper explained. “The steam exhaust makes almost no noise, and the machine speeds over the asphalt pavements almost as silently as a bicycle.... The machine is capable of making forty-two miles [an hour] when the way is clear.”

This past summer, junior fellows working in the Copyright Office discovered several advertisements for the Locomobile, including the one shown here, among uncataloged elements of the Office’s historical deposits.

Not long before registering the ads, the Locomobile Company of America had purchased the automobile firm of inventors F.E. Stanley and F.O. Stanley, along with the brothers’ design for a steam-powered car. By 1902, the company claimed to have produced half the 8,000 cars then running in the United States and to operate the largest and most modern steam automobile factory in the country, according to David Burgess Wise, author of *Steam on the Road*. The ads for the Locomobile called it a “wonder of American production” that “cannot be surpassed,” noting that it met the “approval of critical buyers.”

But the truth about the Locomobile “was not quite up to the publicity,” writes Wise. In a letter

to his American publisher, the English author and poet Rudyard Kipling, a Locomobile owner, signed himself “Yours Locomobilyously.” He wrote that his car had a record of “eternal and



**THE “LOCOMOBILE”**  
is equal to the high standard of American workmanship, and cannot be surpassed. There will be no better self-propelled vehicle made. It is the ideal for pleasure or business. The motive power is known and understood the world over—is no experiment. It is easily controlled, costs but ¼ cent per mile, and can be renewed at even the smallest country towns here or abroad. The “Locomobile” meets the approval of critical buyers. It is durable, handsome in appearance, and weighs but 400 pounds; is unequalled for speed, hill-climbing, or travelling over bad roads, and is absolutely reliable under all circumstances. Noiseless, odorless.

**\$600**

DELIVERY IN NINETY DAYS.

THE “LOCOMOBILE” COMPANY OF AMERICA

AMZI LORENZO BARBER, President.  
LE DROICT L. BARBER, Vice-President. SAMUEL T. DAVIS, Jr., Treasurer.  
New York Office: 11 Broadway.

continuous breakdown.... It is true that she is noiseless, but so is a corpse, and one does not get much fun out of a corpse!”

Sales dwindled, and the company sold the steam-car business and its patents back to the Stanley brothers in 1904. By then, however, the company had developed a gas-powered Locomobile, which enjoyed greater success. Owners of the gas-powered cars included the “who’s who of upper East Coast aristocracy” as well as cinema giants Charlie Chaplin and Cecil B. DeMille, reports the Locomobile Society of America in *The History of the Best-Built Car in America*.

The Locomobile Company continued until 1929, when the stock market crash dealt a fatal blow to its business. ©

*“It is true that she is noiseless, but so is a corpse.”*

RUDYARD KIPLING