All-Volunteer Museum Showcases Early Engines

Coolspring Power Museum in Pennsylvania has a huge collection of early stationary gas and diesel engines.

You can see hundreds of early gas and diesel engines at the Coolspring Power Museum. Ranging from 1 hp. to 600 hp., many of the engines still run like new. It's the largest collection of historically significant, early stationary gas engines in the U.S., if not the world, and is run and staffed completely by volunteers.

"We have 350 engines in 32 buildings spread across 35 acres, with 200 of the engines in operating order," says Dr. Paul Harvey, museum founder. "Our displays range from a 60 by 150-ft. building to individual displays in 10 by 16-ft. buildings scattered all over the grounds, many of them taken down and restored. We are trying to set up more displays with the equipment they powered."

He notes that a 600 hp. engine is the museum's biggest exhibit. The 75-ft. long machine was made by Snow Steam Pump Co. It went into service in 1917 and ran 24/7 until 1996.

His favorite is a 75 hp. Otto, originally installed in a local waterworks in 1920 and kept on standby from the mid 1940's until the 1960's. It has a 21-in. bore with a 30-in. stroke. He loves it because it was used locally, but also because it is big, beautiful and rare, 1 of only 2 surviving 1912 model Ottos.

"When we installed it here, we brought the engineer who had run it in the mid 30's to the dedication," recalls Harvey. "He was 94 and in assisted living at the time. He turned on the gas and air, retarded the timing, opened this and closed that and away it went."

The museum website has a page devoted to exhibits that lists each building and the engines in it with photos and descriptions of each. Much more information is available in publications put out by the museum.

The 600-member museum is not resting on its old engines. A project now underway will provide an early 20th century, German-style building to house a 1903, 12 hp. Augsburg M.A.N. air-blast engine.

"We have a goal of $150,000 for the building," says Jones. "We are raising funds now and hope to break ground this spring."

"It is the oldest diesel engine in the world," says Harvey.

The all-volunteer museum is open one weekend a month from April to October, often with special events in June, July and October.

"We had to cancel in 2020, but normally we bring in 4,000 to 5,000 visitors a year," says Harvey.

"We may have limited hours and volunteer staff, but we really are a world-class museum," says Jones.

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This rare 75 hp. Otto engine is one of only two surviving 1912 models.

Packard Truck Restored To "Factory Original" Condition

Paul Carter and Peter Trant spent 5 years and 5,000 hrs. rebuilding this beautiful 1909 Packard truck.

"My friend Peter Trant and I have been restoring vehicles together for more than 40 years, and one of our toughest, yet most rewarding, projects by far was the 5 years we spent rebuilding a 1909 Packard truck," says Paul Carter of Vancouver, B.C.

A bus restorer in Montana had worked on the vehicle and had gotten the engine running, then decided the remaining work was too much for him to handle. Carter bought it and then trailered it to Vancouver with his son, where he and Trant began their lengthy restoration of the vehicle, which was originally sold to a Nevada mining company for $3,850.

"Peter and I have worked on several 'brass-era' century-old vehicles in the past," Carter says, "but this one was especially challenging." It was painted black, the seat was a wood box, and it had the wrong wheels. Several engine parts that couldn't be repaired had to be re-cast, re-formed, and basically remade from scratch, Carter says. They completely re-built the crankcase, re-bored the cylinders and fitted new pistons with oil rings, ground the valve seats and machined diesel engine valves to fit. They made patterns and castings from factory literature pieces for several engine components and by trial and error shaped new governor flyweights. With careful fabrication and machining they salvaged the bronze water pump. A new radiator core was purchased from England. A friend supplied the correct magneto, which they had re-wound in the U.S. along with the battery ignition system. Every detail was replicated down to the correct Yale ignition lock and key. Carter says all that's missing from the original is a small triangular Packard coil-box badge on the 'like new' original four cylinder engine.

After the engine was back on the chassis they built a mounting system for a new electric starter. The running gear was completely disassembled and the frame was stripped and powder coated in the original Packard Blue. Running gear parts including the spring leaves were powder coated in Packard Cream. A retired old time sign painter applied authentic Packard lettering and the pin striping was handled by a local pin-striping expert. A friend who used to paint for Mercedes-Benz painted the rebuilt seat, firewall and running board boxes in Packard Blue.

Carter says rebuilding the drive system required new shafts and bearings and fitting slightly larger drive sprockets to increase the truck's top speed from 12 to 18 mph. Broken pieces of the transaxle cover plate were re-formed into a template for making the new part.

Carter says one of their toughest jobs was building new wooden wheel rims, known as felloe bands, to replace those that were rotted and filled with holes. That required producing new half-circle felloes that they split down the spoke center, then glued them around the spokes in a staggered pattern to create a full circle. They machined the sides and outside diameter on their wheel lathe. Producing new felloes for the dual rear wheels, which weigh about 500 lbs. when assembled, was complicated by having to avoid cutting into the outside steel band, which they later sanded and smoothed to accept solid rubber tires. Overman Cushion Tire in Ohio made and vulcanized tires onto the rims.

One of their toughest jobs was building new wooden wheel rims to replace those that were rotted and filled with holes.

To register the vehicle for road use they hauled it to a certified scale at a metals business in Vancouver, where the weigh master jokingly said after noting its weight at 6,460 lbs., "if you're scrapping it, we'll take it." Carter replied "that's mighty generous of you, but I think we'll be taking it back home after putting in more than 5,000 hours to restore it in the past five years."

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