

Packards Virginia

Members Pages

My 1949 Packard Super Deluxe

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I have enjoyed the exclusive pleasure of decades-long ownership of numerous Packard automobiles beginning with a 1949 Super Eight sedan, one of five straight-eight powered Packard's that I have bought and sold since 1974. All were operationally terrific automobiles largely attributable to these magnificent Packard-built engines that have always provided seemingly endless miles of dependable and reliable driving pleasure. Down the road I even got bit by the V-eight bug and for a number of years, focused my attention on a few of these later model Packard cars including a 1956 Four Hundred that I had acquired in 1995. Of course we all know these are huge, heavy and powerful vehicles capable of continuous high-speed interstate driving all while being surrounded in the highest level of luxury and ultra-comfort. Although I prefer straight-eight's, one only needs to drive a v-eight torsion-level Packard to truly understand where Packard was going with the brand. Even though they represented such a monumental departure from the Packard standard that had stood for so many years, the automobile market was evolving and certainly Packard was heading in the right direction. The company had after all, focused nearly its entire production life powering its automobiles with straight-eights.

The subject matter of this story involves a strange twist of events culminating in the acquisition of a rare straight eight bathtub instead of a v-eight car that was originally the focus of my efforts. The following text allows me to share with you this fun and exciting experience.

In a fall 1998 issue of Hemmings Classic Car magazine, I had noticed an advertisement announcing an upcoming three-day winter collector car auction event scheduled for January of 1999 to be held in Atlanta Georgia. One of the vehicles that caught my eye was listed as a two-toned Adriatic Blue, Dover White 17,000 mile 1956 Packard Patrician that was to be sold with no reserve. I had attended a number of auctions and bid on a few automobiles as well but never actually succeeded in buying an automobile at auction. I felt this might be an opportunity to give it another try. Plus it was a good excuse to get out of town in the dead of winter and go see some great cars. Next thing I knew it was January and I was on a jet to Atlanta.

It was definitely exciting when I arrived at the auction arena where lots of people were lollygagging around in a panacea of neon lights and spit-shined chrome. I registered and walked around a bit before checking out the 56 Patrician. It was much nicer than the pictures and description had indicated and it immediately gave me the restless feeling it might just sell for more than I was prepared to bid. An auctioneer assistant nearby told me the Patrician would likely come up later in the afternoon or early evening. At that point there was nothing else to do but sit back, take in the action, look at all the car-crazy people and watch the cars get sold. I found myself a spot, got an ice-cold Bud Light from the pretty lady, nestled in with my bid number and let the excitement unfold.

Around five o'clock that afternoon the Packard came up, and more than a few bidders also. Sure enough, I wasn't able to even make a gesture, much less a bid as the final hammer price was more than double what I was willing to bid. Without even taking my hands out of my pockets, my well-laid plans had been permanently altered. I left the arena in frustration and went back to the hotel room but realizing I had nothing but time on my hands I returned the following morning.



Before it got super crowded, I was able to get plenty of walking exercise going up and down aisle after aisle of more than 800 nice cars scheduled to cross the auction block including everything from Model A's to stretch limousines. As I was checking them out, my blood was beginning to boil and the fairly decent wad of cash I was carrying around was fixing to burn a hole in my pocket. Suddenly, ahead about eight cars down the aisle, something bathtub-shaped, yellow and unusual caught my eye. It was a twenty-third series Packard four-door sedan for sure, but was it a Custom Eight? I knew right away the paint did not appear to be a correct Packard color, however, it had the egg-crate grille that usually would identify a Custom. As I approached the vehicle it appeared I had stumbled upon a Super Deluxe. I asked an assistant if I could take a look at the engine compartment and with his blessing, lifted the driver side and there on the data plate was the information I was looking for indicating it was indeed a senior line 2372 Super Deluxe Touring Sedan. I also noticed there was no one else looking at this car. Was this going to be my lucky day?

The Super Deluxe initially was not intended to be a separate model designation but instead simply a trim option for the Senior car line. However, Packard management had something else in mind and here is how the Super Deluxe model came to be. In the quest to create more excitement for their Golden Anniversary 1949 line-up, Packard had taken some of the interior and exterior trim pieces found on the top-of-the-line Custom Eight

and attached them to a few of the Super Eight models. The idea behind this was to attempt to create an upscale model that would give the car-buying public the perceived appearance that Packard's new model line-up was more expansive than it really was. It was a smart move on the part of management as it gave Packard the ability at a very minimal cost to offer basically the same model as the Super Eight in a higher end price range. At a base price of \$2,919.00, the Super Deluxe was priced a couple of hundred dollars above the Super Eight and nearly a thousand below the Custom! It was powered by the same L-head straight-eight 327 cubic inch, 150 horsepower, 5 main bearing engine found in the Super Eight.

As American automobile manufacturers geared up for the post-war boom, sales of automobiles were poised to fly off the map. The excitement was instead subdued when manufacturers became subject to post-war steel shortages and industry-imposed limitations on the availability of other raw materials. By the late 1940's as the industry transitioned from a wartime economy to a consumer economy, the automobile industry struggled to keep up with soaring demand and, as a result, manufacturers were able to produce only a fraction of the automobiles they were scheduled to build. Packard's huge dual line assembly plant on East Grand Boulevard in Detroit that could have been capable of building over 200,000 vehicles in a single model year ended up producing less than half that when twenty-third series production ended. Of those, approximately 2,300 were Super Deluxe models, hence the rarity.

Back to the auction car, I noticed it was equipped with quite a few nice features like three-speed with overdrive, radio, heater, roof-mounted antenna, fog lights, visor, back-up light, wheel hub covers with trim rings and three-stripe broadcloth interior. The speedometer indicated just more than 39,000 miles and after examining the near pristine condition of the underside along with the well-preserved original paint still showing very nicely on the chassis, I believed the mileage could have been at least close to, if not correct. Other than the cowl data plate showing the original paint color to be a "B" code, Packard Blue Metallic, the yellow repaint appeared to be the only departure from an otherwise unmolested factory original car. Why someone would eliminate such an elegant deep blue metallic and have it repainted such an abhorrent shade that to me looked more like urine yellow, no one will ever know. But, nevertheless "what a find," I said to myself! The seller appeared out of the crowd and, noticing that I was crawling all over the car, offered a few comments. Turns out he had purchased the vehicle just a few weeks prior to the auction from an estate in Heflin, Alabama. He added that he had a brief dialogue with someone connected with the estate and was told that car had belonged to a physician who had passed away and the vehicle remained stored for many years. Here it was, about to hit the auction block once again.

One of the auctioneer assistants who had checked the auction number assigned to the vehicle told me it would be late Sunday before the vehicle would reach the auction block. It was still relatively early on Saturday and I knew I'd have to put in the hours if I was to have any opportunity to bid on what I felt was a very special automobile. The seemingly endless procession of vehicles continued throughout the day and late into the evening along with music, crowds and plenty of partying. These things after all are key ingredients of big collector car auctions. By the time I got back to the hotel room late in the evening I was toast. It was an entirely different story on Sunday.

The morning seemed much more relaxed and laid back as most folks appeared to be in no hurry to get into the bidders area. I had been noticing as the afternoon wore on and the Packard was slowly inching its way up, the crowd had been thinning to a point where it

appeared the high rollers and other bigger money bidders who were jazzing up the action on Saturday had mysteriously vanished. It was getting down to only a handful of bidders and the remainder seemed to be just sitting around yawning. When the car reached the block it was after three o'clock in the afternoon. For whatever reason it appeared as though bidders were not really interested in an otherwise very nice Packard.



To this day I feel like I may have been the only person at that auction who might have paid any serious attention to it. The auctioneer initially could not even conjure up an opening bid! Finally a gentleman waved his hand. He was the only bidder and he didn't appear very enthusiastic. He might have been a dealer. I couldn't tell. All I knew was the fact that no one else was bidding. The auctioneer reminded everyone that the opening bid was well below the seller's reserve and just about the time when the auctioneer would motion for the car to be rolled off the block as a no-sale, the seller came up to the stage and whispered something to the auctioneer. With newly energized enthusiasm, the auctioneer shouted out. "Folks, the seller standing next to me just lifted the reserve." "This car is going to sell right here, right now." "I've got one bid from this gentleman here." "Will someone else give another bid." I raised my hand. The other gentleman raised his hand. I again raised mine. Then, silence. "No more bids?" "Come on folks." "Anyone else?" "All in, all done?" "Last chance, going once, going twice, SOLD to the gentleman over there in row three." Pointing his finger at me, the auctioneer simply smiled and said, "Thank you sir."

I couldn't believe it. What an incredible acquisition, even after including the buyer's premium! And what a blessing in disguise that the car had crossed the auction block after the arena had all but emptied out. Or maybe the incorrect yellow repaint scared some folks away. It didn't matter. The Packard was mine! I signed the necessary paper work and proceeded to the cashier. After settling up I found a vendor area of auto-transport

staff people and made a deal to transport the Packard to Virginia Beach. On the flight to Norfolk that evening, I couldn't help but smile for the entire return trip happy that fate and good timing had not only put me back in the driver's seat of a straight-eight Packard, it had transformed this unusual auction experience into one unforgettable and rewarding weekend.

