

A Grand Old Car from East Grand

My 1947 Packard Custom Super Clipper touring sedan

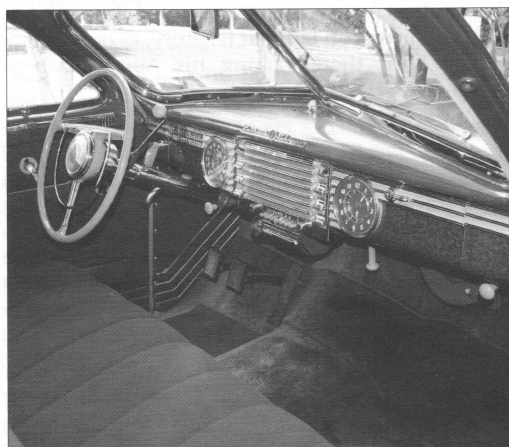
By John W. Lawrence



I first became aware of the Clipper in 2006 at a July 4th car show. I was living in Santa Fe, New Mexico at the time. I had just moved back to my hometown after a 15-year absence from working at the University of California's Lawrence Berkeley and Lawrence Livermore national laboratories. Shortly after moving back, I purchased a very nice 1937 Six (115C) convertible coupe. My father, Henry Lawrence, was a long-time Packard dealer in Santa Fe, and this was the first Packard in the family since the mid-1960s. I was exhibiting the 115C at the show when a spectator came up to me after admiring the car. He said he had a Custom Clipper at home. I commented that they are great Packards and about my long admiration of them.

The first time I saw the Clipper was later that summer at another local car show. The car immediately impressed me. It was painted a rich maroon. The paint was shiny, but checked as the old nitrous cellulose lacquer does over the years. The interior was in excellent shape with its maroon and ivory piped wool broadcloth upholstery. Thick Mossstred carpeting covered the floor, and the unique longitudinally-stitched headliner crowned the interior. The Clipper was well optioned with overdrive, heater-defroster with under-seat heater, radio with roof-mounted antenna, fog lights, chrome wheel trim rings, and it sported a set of five period-correct Firestone "Gum Dipped" whitewall tires. The spare had never been used. The engine compartment was one of the nicest I had seen. Needless to say, I had to have this car.

The owner, Mike, was willing to sell the Clipper. He had owned it for 20 years and wanted to move on to oth-



er projects. Our conversation developed and he told me about the person from whom he had bought the car. The previous owner, Stan, had rebuilt it from the clutch forward in the mid-1980s. He was presently a partner in a shop in Albuquerque specializing in maintaining, repairing, and restoring vintage vehicles.

I went down to Stan's shop to learn more about the Clipper. We soon discovered we had much in common. His late father-in-law, Al, was a long-time customer of my father, primarily for the care of a 1937 Twelve convertible sedan Dietrich, but there were a few other Packards throughout the years. After a couple hours of reminiscing, he told me about his time with the Clipper.

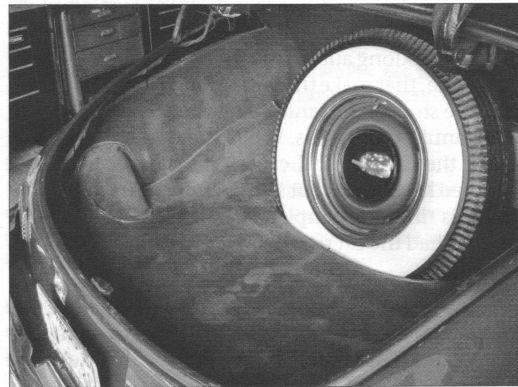
Stan's then future father-in-law (for whom he was working for at the time) purchased the Clipper from a party in Omaha, Nebraska. Stan went to Omaha, and drove it back to New Mexico. Al and Stan soon discovered that even though it had relatively low mileage, only about 40,000 miles, it needed engine work. They decided to do a complete rebuild and take care of any other needed work while the engine and sheet metal parts were removed.

Stan was meticulous in the appearance of the rebuilt engine. It was painted the authentic Packard engine green. Stainless steel head nuts and washers replaced the plain ones to add a high-class, but subtle look. The starter, generator, and distributor were rebuilt and their cases painted with black crackle finish. The oil bath air cleaner and other engine accessories were painted a nice glossy black. Correct and chrome plated hose clamps were used on radiator and heater hoses. To finish off

the job, all fasteners on the engine and in the engine compartment were replaced with stainless steel ones. Although not 100-percent authentic, the engine and its compartment are a beautiful sight, reminiscent of the pre-war Super Eights. It still glows in appearance after all these years. He also mounted a brand new set of Firestone tires at this time.

It turns out there is a direct connection between the Clipper and my father. Dad finally decided to quit the automotive business in the mid-1970s, and to get rid of his Packard parts, special tools and manuals. He asked my brothers and me if we had any interest in his old Packard things. We were well into, and busy with, our own non-automotive lives at that point and declined his offer (I wish I knew then what I know now). Dad ended up gifting all of his Packard items to Al.

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It turns out there was a complete set of brand new hydraulic valve lifters mixed in with the parts collection. These lifters eventually went into the Clipper's engine when it was rebuilt. Stan also said that he conferred with my father many times for advice during the rebuilding process.

Stan bought the Clipper from Al soon after the rebuilding, but then needed to sell it shortly thereafter and sold it to Mike. After my due diligence with Stan, and with much back and forth negotiating with Mike, a deal was struck for me to purchase the car. Unfortunately, Mike decided to drop out of the deal at the very last minute, saying his daughter did not want him to sell the Clipper. I was deeply disappointed with his decision and the timing of it, but there was nothing I could do to change his mind.

Time passed and we moved to Austin, Texas to be close to my daughter and her family. In August 2008 we drove to California to partake in all the activities during the weeklong automotive events on the Monterey peninsula, that make this time of the year there so special. We stopped in Santa Fe on the return leg to visit with family and friends. While there I got to thinking about the Clipper and called Mike to see if he had changed his mind about selling the car. He said he had and this time we completed the sale. After returning home, I had the car transported to Austin. It was finally mine!

Since owning the Clipper I have worked on getting the maintenance and service up to date and doing necessary repairs. The car had been driven very little in the last 20-odd years and it needed attention to all the basic systems and operations. Some unnecessary improvements, trying to work around operational problems, had also been done. After a few months in the garage, I finally worked through all the Clipper's systems.

The Clipper is a wonderful driving motor car. I have exhibited it at a few local car shows where it was most often the only Packard on display. I drove it to the 2011 Texas Packard Meet in Salado for its first exposure to the Packard community where it was well received. It brings smiles and many favorable comments whenever it is out and about. It is indeed a grand old car from East Grand.

The pictures below are of special interest to me. The top one is my brother, Bill, and me in front of a 1946 Clipper Deluxe club sedan. The photo was taken when the car was new and we were much younger. It may have been the first post-war Packard my father received. The bottom photo is my brother and me in front of the 1947 Clipper Custom Super sedan in 2008, shortly after it was delivered to Austin. The Clippers look the same, but the brothers have taken slightly different appearances. ⚡

