

I Remember Old Tuscaloosa

By Fred Maxwell

"How's your wife?"

"Compared to what?"

"Comparisons are odious" so it pays to be both explicit and cautious.

Back in about 1910 when car owners were few but were also very proud of their autos a favorite yardstick of comparison of the different models was: "Will it climb our River Hill in high gear?"

In most cases the answer was "no." It was quite a few years later before the average car could be counted on to "top" River Hill in high gear.

The old road (not yet a highway) from Tuscaloosa to Birmingham was very primitive and contained more hazards than a golf course. The usual route was through Brookwood, Adger, Johns and Bessemer. A short section was through a swamp where the roadbed was also a creekbed.

Obviously when the creek rose after a freshet, the "highway" was temporarily closed to automobiles.

I remember in about 1909 Mr. Sam Alston ordered three E.M.F. (later Studebaker) automobiles from the factory to be delivered in Birmingham—one car for himself and the other two for friends. Three drivers went to Birmingham to drive the cars to Tuscaloosa.

The weather did not cooperate and

there was considerable rainfall. The first car to reach Tuscaloosa reported about nine hours overall travel time and the last car to arrive reported travel time of 22 hours.

"How about that?"

In about three years the "highway" was greatly improved so that the normal driving time to Birmingham was from four to five hours. However it was quite a few years later before automobile drivers could report that they were able to drive all the way to Birmingham in high gear—with no gear shifting on account of road conditions.

So when you drive next time to Birmingham on I-59 just let your thoughts go back to 1910 and don't let the comparison be too odious—just be thankful.

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