

Transcription: Grand Canyon Historic Society

Interviewee: Chris Howell (CH) and Nick Howell (NH)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Brothers Nick and Chris recount their experience driving their 1902 Toledo steam car from Flagstaff to Grandview Point. Their Toledo steam car is the same one that made the run from Flagstaff to the Grand Canyon in 1902.

Date of Interview: August 27, 2014

Method of Interview: In-person interview while driving Toledo steam car from Grand Canyon to Flagstaff, Arizona

Transcriber: Anonymous

Date of Transcription: 9/18/2020

Transcription Reviewers: Sue Priest, Tom Martin

Keys: Toledo steam car, historic automobiles, rally cars, vintage car restoration

TM: We are in a truck exiting Grandview Point with Chris and Nick Howell. Today is the 27th of August. It's Wednesday, 2014. We're in Grand Canyon National Park. We're heading for Plaza Bonita in Tusayan. These two gentlemen have just driven their Toledo steam car from Flagstaff to the Grandview Point here today. What are you guys thinking? I just remembered Emmie, she said, "Oh, ask them what they're thinking."

CH: Well, me I'm Chris and sort of a bit dazed. It's a little bit unreal. We finally achieved the objective. We finally got there. All the trials, the tribulations, the difficulties, everything, we finally actually got there. We couldn't have done that without the awesome help that a lot of guys did freely. They came along and enjoyed the experience. I think they really did enjoy the experience. That's pretty humbling that complete strangers from across the world all come together and we meet to do this thing and we achieved it. A lot of difficulties but we got there. So I'm a little sort of stunned really in that sense. Sort of savoring the moment and thinking we actually did it. We got there.

NH: Yeah, it hasn't quite sunk in with me yet. It's like well, yeah great we did it. Just all that assistance, fantastic, the towing and you working out the route, Tom. Route that you call it. Doing all the planning was something else. Then the backup today with everything from the tea to the lunch stops, yeah, great. The car was from my point of view, I'd like for it to have gone a bit better. It's the most arduous trip we've taken it on because it's always been on tarmac. There were pretty amazing roads washed out here and there but fantastic variety across the plains, and then through the woods, and up here. So we had a few tows but we did the job. We got the car to the Grand Canyon in the end, which was just something else. Another thing is it isn't quite going to sink in until I see the photos again.

TM: What's it like to drive this steam car?

NH: What is it? What?

TM: What's it like to drive it?

NH: Well, it can be scary with some of the things we had today when the throttle, the accelerator, the steam throttle sticks open.

CH: You're out of control then.

NH: You can't stop it. You're trying to get the transmission, as it were, into a neutral position to jump out and flick the throttle closed. It's the first time I've ever had that over here. I hope I haven't damaged something on it.

CH: We had a wonderful hairy moment. Early part of the day we were going up a straight piece of road, and it was very wide, and the rain that had happened yesterday had sort of basically dried off. But things were a bit squelchy, a little bit. The ground here is very, very loose clay, and pebbles, stones. We kept on the track, it was a good track, and suddenly the car just veered off to the left. I mean we were going into the ditch. I said, "What are you doing?" And, "What do you mean?" We actually, thank goodness, stopped. I mean we were in the squelchy stuff. I leapt off and thought we'll try and push it back. And "You steer it out." Well Nick suddenly was suddenly moving the tiller left and right. Nothing. He said, "I haven't got any steering." So I looked down. The steering is connected to the tiller arm just with a little pin and that pin had shaken itself loose. It was literally hanging out. I mean I just picked the pin off. It hadn't gone into the dirt. It was there.

NH: The knuckle had dropped down underneath.

CH: Yep. Really all I had to do was to pull the knuckle up. I mean practically the tiller was in-line. I pulled it up. I pushed the pin in, it's a one-way pin because it's tapered, and we had steering again. Nick came around with a little club hammer, backed it in and that was it. We were shaken, not stirred.

NH: That's another thing we never had before. I never had a flat before.

CH: Yeah.

NH: I never had the throttle stick before. But there's all the experience of here.

CH: These old cars are unpredictable. You know, they're old.

NH: As you can see when you start them. Well I was only just a little bit of blowing down the boiler there. You know, the car is completely silent and you think it's switched off. But that power is all there, it built up in the boiler, 250 pounds. You know, you just open that valve, you see how much power is in it. So they can be a lot of fun and a bit of a challenge. That's why I bought the thing. They're a challenge. We could have done that route easily in an internal combustion engine car with a good magneto.

TM: So, Nick, the challenges that you faced in the last two days - flat tire, the steering coming disengaged.

NH: The roads.

TM: The roads.

NH: The car's never been shaken around as much as that.

TM: Well it had, 112 years ago.

CH: Yeah.

NH: Well yeah. I'm pretty sure they had tarmac roads in those days. That stagecoach trail was pretty good.

TM: In the reading that you've done and the research that you've done on the car and the original run to Grand Canyon, now this is the second run to Grand Canyon from Flagstaff this little car has done, any experiences that you suddenly realized, "Oh, they had written about that. That's what they were talking about." Did that ever happen?

NH: Well, you had the route as it were. But at least we didn't break the chain which they did on the original run.

TM: Why do you think they did that?

NH: I think they had it too slack or they were going too fast over a big boulder and the chassis twist too much.

CH: They broke the glass, the sight glass.

NH: Yesterday, that's why I tightened the chain up. I was running around Flagstaff Old Town and I could hear the chain was rattling a bit so we tightened it up and great. So we didn't have that problem. I was a bit worried about the sight glass because they broke theirs as well. You got huge respect for them. Challenge in doing that trip in the first place. And in a way you realize how much spin there was in those days. You know when he came back in seven hours, I don't know how he managed it. If he went across the same roads as we did today, that would have been quite something in seven hours. But that's what they said he did it in. Just him and Barry. So huge respect for the pioneering that they did in those days. Because until you do a challenge like that again, on the same roads, you don't know what they experienced. That's been the fun of doing this. Especially when we were talking as we went across those spaces. All along the route we've been saying, "Oh this must be Red Canyon" or "Oh this..."

CH: Red Horse Canyon.

NH: Red Horse Canyon. "OK, this must be such and such." We still didn't really find the Dog Knobs did we?

CH: No. Actually I think we were so sort of engrossed in what we were doing and concentrating on the road and the big towing and all the things. We occasionally looked up and we saw the landscape gradually changing. The trees getting larger and all this sort of thing. It was a wonderful thing going up there. I felt really quite emotional a lot of the time thinking, "We're getting there. We're going to get there."

NH: You were pretty amazed by the landscape. You kept gasps at this and switching your GoPro off and on. "Oh yeah, here's the plains and here's the deserty bit" where it's pretty dry and flat.

CH: Yeah, like I say it was quite emotional really. I think a lot of things going back to the team, you know, with some of the crap that I've been having in the past year when a lot of the time you feel on your own. And then there's a bunch of strangers who have come together as a team. That really cuts me up, cuts me up quite a lot.

NH: Yeah, I was pretty choked up when we got there, to the Point in the end. Apart from seeing the Grand Canyon for the first time, it was just surreal of actually being there in the same place 112 years later.

CH: It's amazing. It really does pop out of the forest. You drive along and you look through the trees and think, "Hey what's that?" And then...

NH: How can it be a canyon just beyond these trees?

CH: You can imagine, if there was no road there you really would pop out from the forest and have to stop because otherwise you'd be descending rather rapidly a mile down into the ground.

NH: Winfield Hogaboom's description was pretty good wasn't it?

CH: Excellent. Excellent.

NH: He came out of the trees and there he was facing the deepest chasm in the world.

CH: Yep, here's the biggest hole in the world. So yeah it's the end of a long day, a long two days. A lot of effort. We learned a lot. I learned a little bit more about the car. That you don't shove the accelerator down. You get it going and then you pull it back and it starts to get its own little rhythm and you can hear that little engine going ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch.

NH: Very quiet and sometimes we were gently talking to each other. It was so quiet.

CH: And that sounded sweet. It was chattering away quietly to itself. So if you can really get it running really well, it would be sweet. It would be really sweet.

TM: So when you were riding in the car, not being towed, but just under your own power, could you hear the birds chirping?

CH: Yeah, you could hear...

NH: Yeah, it was so quiet sometimes. You didn't even hear the little clack-clack of the water pump when it's right up to steam. When you're right up to steam and the burner is shut down, you don't even have that whistling sound. I've got to sort that out.

CH: All you hear is this lovely little chug, chug, chug going on. Very quiet. Very happy.

TM: What are your thoughts as we hurdle down this Highway 64? We're going about 50 miles an hour, maybe 45. What are your thoughts about the idea of conveyance in 1902 vs. 2014?

NH: We were saying then as we were going, okay we're doing better than a horse here which was the only comparison they had. So it was obviously surprising to them what you could achieve compared to now where you're used to cruising along at 50, 60 miles an hour. Air conditioning and all.

CH: Travel for us today is just normal. You can hop on an airplane, you're around the world. It's just par for the deal, isn't it? Back then travel... When we were traveling across Death Valley you cannot imagine how did these guys have the bravery to say well we've got to get across there. Somebody had to get on the horse with enough water and food and strike out into nothing in the hope that you're gonna find water, you're gonna find somewhere where you can actually then go back again. So those people, they had to 'yeah we found somewhere', and then get back to where they'd left the rest of them or maybe they didn't come back.

TM: So you mean Doyle and Lippencott had to find water?

NH: No, no when we were going across Death Valley.

TM: Oh Death Valley. Yeah.

NH: You're thinking of all the pioneers.

CH: The pioneering spirit.

NH: The wagon trains and not knowing what was there and how long it would last.

CH: Lippencott had that pioneering spirit. He said, "Look, now this is a really old way of getting up here." They knew that people were getting charged a silly amount of money to take the Santa Fe Railway. "Come on, there's another way. Instead of taking horseback or stage, come on, we've got this thing called an automobile. We're going to have a run through the forest up there." He didn't succeed, but he tried.

NH: Yeah, he got there but it's interesting that they didn't actually start a steam bus service until afterwards. They realized it wasn't so easy. But, of course, developments were so fast in those days. The internal combustion engine. I don't know when the first buses did start going there, Charabancs and things. I'll have to reread the Mangum's book and see what they say.

TM: So was it a smooth ride?

NH: No! Smooth across the plains but oh boy some of those washed out... You're worried about the amount of rocks, and branches, and roots you're going over, the car shaking.

TM: I mean does your butt hurt?

CH: No.

NH: No, no.

CH: But, my butt is just about cooling off now because you have got one hell of a hot thing underneath your seat.

NH: It's insulated.

CH: I know it's insulated but, you know, that was warm. Today was pleasant. I mean we are grateful for the rain yesterday but we had a nice cool day today really.

TM: It's the original heated seat.

CH: Yeah, yeah, you bet. We didn't have to press a button, it was just the original hot seat.

NH: Emptying that water tank out, it was amazing how warm that was. Now that's not circulating water. Some of it would have been.

CH: It's radiated heat from the boiler.

NH: Well yeah, but where the steam exhaust comes out, I took all the insulation off it so it actually goes out across the top of the tank. The heat exhaust and the steam exhaust that comes out underneath goes through a tube that goes through the tank. So all the radiated heat coming out of that. That's why it gets more efficient the longer you run it.

CH: Yeah.

NH: You preheat the water well.

CH: And that's why you need to be patient when you fire it up and take a bit of time and...

NH: No it's not that. It's the first few miles.

CH: Few miles, yeah. Probably by the end of the day she was just about warmed up and running nicely.

NH: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it was good.

TM: It did seem that you steamed up at the Grandview Tower fairly quickly. Were you guys running a good lot of steam on that last section?

NH: When we were being towed along there I had the burner on and the pump on so we got a full boiler. And then I had to open the...because the engine's turning over even though it's not turning over because of the boiler cause you're being towed. That means the water pump's working and the air

pump's working. The water pump's always going if the engine's turning. When the boiler's full you open a bypass valve. It still pumps but it's pumping it back into the tank then.

TM: Oh, clever.

NH: So it's the only control. You got to keep an eye on that little mirror cause if you overfill the boiler it will overflow into the engine and smash the engine to pieces. We were getting a bit close to that when it disappeared up the sight glass. That's why we had to have a fair bit of steam by the time we arrived. We didn't ask who that English guy was did we?

CH: No, no.

NH: He asked where we were from and it was a very English accent he had. Said he'd been waiting a long time.

TM: Where was this?

CH: When we got to Grandview Point tower.

NH: When we got to the tower. He came across me and said. "Where are you from?" I said, "Cornwall." He said, "Oh. Your brother?" I said, "He's north of London in Berkhamsted. He didn't say how long he'd been waiting did he?"

CH: Oh, they waited a long time and that was great. I don't know, the word had got around and a group had gathered there. They'd been very patient, I think. Again, it's great to see that people wanted to see this occasion.

NH: Yeah it was nice to steam off then.

CH: Again, steam off. They were I think, I don't know, horrified or amazed, incredulous. I heard people say when we moved up, "Hey you're dripping." I said, "Yeah, water." The whole concept of this thing leaking. I mean if you were running down the road in a modern automobile with fluids flowing out everywhere you wouldn't last very long anyway and secondly you'd be stopped and saying, "What's going on?" You're leaking, you've got a problem. We didn't have a problem.

NH: They can't believe it's a steam car.

CH: Yeah. What does it work?

NH: They see a track engine, they know it's steam. A locomotive, they know its steam. A steam car's a little bit different. Yeah, fun.

TM: So Nick, this incredible automobile is covered in mud.

NH: Yeah, pretty awful.

TM: It looks like some of the woodworking was kind of jarred a little bit.

NH: Yeah.

TM: There's a lot of mud kind of in the floorboard. What are you gonna do with the car now? What are you gonna do? What are you thinking?

NH: Well, we'll obviously clean it off. I'm not sure about cleaning it off before we go back to the UK or just leave it and do it when I'm back there. Then I've got to carefully go over examining everything to

see if we've cracked or fractured anything on the chassis and the body. Hopefully we haven't. Then work on...

TM: Will you disassemble it to do that?

CH: Take it apart.

NH: Well, if anything needs to be taken apart, yeah I'll take it apart. I've got to sort that throttle valve out and why it's sticking like that.

TM: Right.

CH: And the water pump which is leaking. And the tiller.

NH: I know what's wrong with the water pump.

TM: What's wrong with it?

NH: It's the piston that pulls up and down inside that creates the vacuum to pull the water up. It's like a cylinder with a closed end, one end. That bottom end is in the pump. It's got a rod pulling it up and down that goes down inside the cylinder and it's fixed to a pivot point in the bottom. It's the pins on the pivot point that have been... Where the solder was the air is getting in so that's why it was only pumping half the time. And on the steering column it's having different packing material in there in the hand pump.

CH: But by running the car for a long time you start to learn which bits are working well, which bits aren't working well, and which bits you know really...

NH: All that twisting and rough roads we've been going on made it...

CH: That's why the chassis has probably had those tubes and the ball joints and everything so the chassis was able to twist and not to distort. If it was rigid it would maybe have distorted. Here it sort of rode the ground better. I don't know what it looked behind when we were going all over there.

NH: All the wood is very flexible that's on top of all that. The engine and the boiler is all hanging on that wood.

CH: It's designed to be flexible up to a point.

NH: We bottomed out the steering twice. Bang. If that had been real hard bang, it slams it straight up through that aluminum casting.

TM: Is this the roughest trek you've taken this car on?

NH: Yeah, oh yeah, by marks. It's been across fields, county fairs, and steam fairs and things but that's the roughest it's ever been driven.

[pause going through Tusayan and stopping for dinner]

TM: We had a nice dinner at Plaza Bonita here in downtown Tusayan. Now we're gonna drive back to Flagstaff. This is a continuation of an interview we just started on August 27th, 2014 with Nick and Chris Howell on the day they completed the second run of a 1901 Toledo steam car from Flagstaff to Grandview Point. Nick, I'm kind of interested in how you got into historic automobiles.

NH: Into what?

CH: Historic automobiles.

NH: Historic automobiles. Every teenager starts with a historic automobile.

TM: What was your first car?

NH: Every 20 year old...

CH: Austin A35.

NH: Austin A35 or A30.

TM: What's an Austin A30?

NH: Funny little rounded car with a little 950 cc engine. But yeah, I think it was 5 or 15 Pounds, I can't remember which.

NH: What happened to all these plants? What are they doing out there?

TM: Well, the whole thing is made for cars to go bombing right through the thing.

NH: Oh my goodness.

CH: I still like that sign at the entrance of Babbitt Ranches where it was closed. Just stick six bullets through it. [laughs]

NH: Chris, what was your first one? The Cortina or what?

CH: No, mine was the Austin A35.

NH: Oh yeah, mine as well. I had a little black one, your cream colored one.

TM: What's the age difference between you two?

CH: Eighteen months.

NH: Eighteen months.

TM: OK. Now who's older?

CH: Nick.

NH: I am. I'm glad you couldn't tell. [laughs]

TM: I hadn't a clue. I thought he was the older guy.

NH: OK.

CH: What was that English greeting?

NH: So you start off and then get something a bit more powerful or a mini.

TM: So what came next?

NH: That was a mini, I think.

CH: I had a Mark 2 Cortina then. Remember I stripped it completely.

NH: Yeah.

CH: Rebuilt it again. Got it all back together again and...

TM: So were you guys living in the same house at the time?

CH: At that time, yeah.

NH: Yeah.

TM: Was this in like A levels or something? I don't understand the school system so...

NH: Yeah.

CH: We went to, you know, the sort of C high school.

NH: When you're 18 years old.

CH: No, I rebuilt this car and got it all sprayed black and white. I had a Ducati motorbike 215 I rebuilt. So I had two black things. A black motorbike and a black Cortina. A week after I built the black Cortina it was stolen. It was discovered in High Wycombe. The police gave chase and the guy basically turned the thing over and it caught fire and that was the end of the car.

TM: Ouch.

NH: That was 715JOO.

CH: No, no, that was the Mark 1.

NH: That was the Mark 1. Right. Yeah.

CH: WMO212H was the number plate of the Mark 2.

TM: Number plate. Yeah, all right.

CH: The Mark 1, that was something I bought for 25 quid because it had the big engine going. So hauled that out. You bought one that had a half engine. You know, the block with the pistons and crank it. You used your own head and put all the couplings back on. That was a really...that was a nice cheap car.

TM: So was that the automobile that really helped you understand engines and mechanics?

CH: No the A35 was such a simple engine. You could take those apart and...

NH: The basis of the mini engine.

CH: Yeah. It's an easy one. So, in the end then you grow up a little bit more, except he hasn't grown up. He still plays around with engines and I did other things. That's the way it went. I got interested in old buildings I suppose.

NH: Yeah, you're into old buildings.

CH: I like creating things.

NH: You like carpentry.

CH: Yeah.

NH: You're good at cabinet making and doing very exact work with wood.

TM: So what did you get next then, Nick?

NH: I think it was an Austin Mini Countryman which is the one with the sort of faux wooden back to it.

CH: You call it a shooting brake. You know, the one with all the wooden trim around it.

TM: Like a Woodie?

CH: Yeah.

NH: Like a Woodie. Yeah, it was a little Mini Woodie. And then a Mini where I put an 1100cc engine in it. They go a bit faster.

TM: Yeah but that still seems awfully small.

CH: Yeah, Yeah.

NH: Yeah, well.

CH: You're young and you're not earning a lot of money yet.

NH: 1100 seems small but look at this thing. We're going along 60 miles an hour. It's just changed down again. And it's got a I don't know how many liter V8 under the bonnet. It depends on how the engine performs.

TM: Right.

NH: After that, goodness knows. After the Mini was the Healey. Sold the Mini for £250 and bought that Austin-Healey. Was at Hammel Hampstead. Ridiculously wide racing tires. All the worst things. You know, you bought it in the dark, in the rain, in an unlit lock-up garage and it looked sensational with all the gleam from the rain. Next morning when you looked at it, it was a pile of shit.

TM: "What did I do?"

CH: Yeah.

NH: That took about ten years to rebuild. Shipped it down to Colville, oh boy. Then yeah, then you get married and you forget about cars for a while.

TM: Did you?

NH: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Cause kids and mortgage and everything else comes along. Paying for the house.

CH: Business. You're doing your business.

NH: You're building your business up. There's other more important things really.

TM: When did you get back into cars? I mean, did you really just leave them?

NH: After Phil Coombs who was an American, came over and bought it after 10 years of rebuilding that Austin-Healey and using a lot of the factory parts on it which nobody was really interested in those days. The triple weather carburetors and a straight-cut gearbox. The parts they used on the rally cars. Phil bought it for £10,000 which was a lot of money in those days. I was building, basically, a rally replica. But I managed to then buy genuine rally car.

TM: Where did you find it?

NH: I got to know some of the old racing drivers.

TM: Really?

NH: Yeah, yeah two of them. They wanted £10,000 for one of them which was complete and running. But I looked at it and it didn't have its original engine in and it didn't have its original chassis. And in England the license plate of a car stays with the car.

TM: Really? OK.

NH: So you can look back fifty years and find photographs of your car cause it will have the same license plate on it. Some of the fancy ones which might spell out someone's initials or names get sold. It's quite interesting to be able to find a car like that. Anyway, the market went up. Basically what I did was, the £10,000 one I didn't like because it wasn't original enough and he had one that was very original totally in pieces. It had never been restored and it never got on the racetrack. It stayed as a worn-out rally car. I paid £6,000 for that.

TM: In pieces.

NH: In pieces.

TM: Like completely stripped down.

NH: A bare chassis and no suspension or wheels. No body on it, nothing. But it was all there. I spent, I don't know, three or four years, me doing some of the work and paying for some of the work to be done. Then raced that. I raced the first Healey for one season and then the kids came along. I've got pictures of Tom and Ed they're like five and four, or seven and five. The Healey was really good fun in '87. The race team, five of us, going across.... The Coppa Italia was a guy who had a fantastic collection of really historic Ferraris and Jaguars from the Baltic. Ran a coffee company and was very wealthy. Dubbini his surname was. He thought the Mille Miglia reruns that they were doing was too much pansying around and posing so he set up the Coppa Italia, basically. That was a week of racing around Italy where every day you had two, sometimes three, hill climbs to do. Those hill climbs could be one mile, the longest was ten. And you had...

TM: I mean I'm thinking Amalfi coast kind of stuff where you can do hill climbing kind of things? Are you inland?

NH: Closed roads, amazing. He had organized the road to be closed going up a mountain. And timekeepers and everything else there and circuits between Monza and Bochetto. Then in the evenings you'd have amazing meals. A lot of cars, a lot of very wealthy guys in some fancy cars. Then a GTO Ferrari was worth about a million pounds. My Healey was worth about £50,000. Well, the GTO at Pebble Beach, there's only 34 of them. That sold for \$36,000,000. My Healey would be now worth about £200,000, I suppose £300,000. That was fun. When I sold it in '89, it was good timing first of all because the market crashed in 1990. A guy bought it for £125,000. In fact it was the chairman of Aston Martin who is a Greek shipping family. They bought Phil Coombs' car, which wasn't as original as mine, six months later for £210,000 pounds. Mine was one world record price and then Phil's was the new world record price. Even after the market crashed, Phil's went and sold for £86,000 and mine sold for £60,000. Meanwhile, I rushed out because I'd made that much money out of it.

TM: By that time, though, were you machining your own parts? Were you just getting good at finding original equipment?

NH: Yeah, it was the original equipment then and not so much making stuff. I didn't have a lathe back then. The Healey making such good money enabled me to... Everyone has an idea of a car they want and

I wanted a vintage Bentley. Vintage Bentleys were made up to 1930. After that Rolls Royce bought Bentley out. The vintage are the classic ones with the big radiator, 3 liter, 4.5 liter, 6.5, and 8 liter.

TM: Eight liter!

CH: Yeah.

NH: Eight liter is the biggest one.

TM: Wow!

NH: Yeah they're pretty sensational cars. They only made them from 1922/'23 really 'til 1929 when the crash happened. Was going through different Bentleys to get a more original one. That was fun restoring one of those which at first looked like a two-seater boattail. Mellowish body, the only Bentley that had a mellowish body on it. In fact it used to have two little picky seats in the back. It came from Cornwall and I got some photographs of the family when they had the car new you can see the little picky seat. The family that own that car now are taking it to America, New Zealand. That was wonderful faded paintwork. The bonnet had been polished so many times it was starting to go through to the gray undercoat. It was a black, black car.

TM: So would you go through these things and just take them completely down to the frame?

NH: No. If they don't need it, it's not worth doing. I prefer a car that's got character to it. I'm not into the whole thing being shiny. The Healey I did it with, and the Toledo. I suppose the Straker-Squire I did it with. I didn't rebuild the back axle then and I had the engine rebuilt. It's a pretty complicated engine. Yeah, it's just different cars. But when I look back on it, originality is the first thing. Then after that it's, you know, what sort of car. It doesn't have to be a well-known make but I prefer to buy makes that people don't know about and I like it. Engines I like. Straker-Squire was a fantastic straight six, 4.5 liter, individual cylinders, overhead cam, four valves per cylinder, 1918, do over 100 miles an hour.

TM: Chris and I were talking about that. I mean it sounds like an airplane engine.

NH: Yeah, we were talking about it the other day. Great fun. But once you've finished it and they run well, what do you do? You take it out of the garage, you go for a run in it and you put it back in the garage. I noticed the steam car guys never seem to quite finish it. There's always something as you've seen today. You know, the throttle valve stuck, not making enough steam or making too much water, the boiler's too high, the boiler's too low. So I thought I gotta get a steam car. It was actually just the Toledo engine I first bought. Not this Toledo engine.

TM: What attracted you to the Toledo? It like I want to do steam and something came along that said Toledo on it? Or were you...

NH: I was looking on eBay and there was a Toledo steam car engine. And I like engines. In steam car engine terms it was a ten times better design than a Locomobile or a little Stanley. Much more substantial, cast crank cases with oil in them. So I just bought it and then started looking and finding out about Toledos. Looking up the magazines – 1901 Horseless Age, 1902 Horseless Age. That's when this one came up two years later, complete, in that auction in Tewah City. So great, buy it and thinking it was different. Maybe the car that went across the Rocky Mountains. Didn't know anything about Flagstaff and the Grand Canyon. So that was just time, we only found that out just before Christmas this year.

TM: So just before Christmas you're like, hey this car is the car that went to the Grand Canyon. How did you get the idea?

NH: Well, we'd already had the invitation to Pebble Beach which was pretty amazing.

TM: Right. How did that happen?

NH: I don't know. You're recommended. Someone recommends your car or knows your car. Then a committee meets and sends out invitations. So you receive an invitation. Would you like to bring... We're gonna feature early steam cars this year and we'd be really pleased to have you as one. And you have to reply by a certain date. Then you're in a certain selection committee and they decide then whether they're gonna pick you or not. So we're going to Pebble Beach last spring. Then let's start looking into this Rocky Mountain trip a little bit better. Might as well have a crack. That picture above the Grand Canyon. Oh my God, look, there's the same chassis, the same special body.

TM: Interesting...yeah.

NH: Then me finding an article. Chris downloaded a decent size so we could read it and then it just rolled on from there. How you doing, bro?

CH: Good.

TM: So are you thinking about another vehicle or are you just going to stick with the Toledo for a while?

NH: I'll probably start thinking about another one cause we've done a lot this one now, though I'd like to get it going better first. I'll just see what comes up. I only have one car and one motorcycle at a time now. There was a time when I had six of them and you're running around maintaining them all, exercising them. It's like having six mistresses on the trot. It really focuses your mind. It's easy to build a collection if you can afford to. Just buy another one, just buy another one. But it really focuses it down if you've got one or two. Which one's going to go to replace it. Then you think, no I'll stay with what I got. But steam, I'd like to stick with steam. Either that or I really like the idea of like nine or twelve liter. Anything from 1910 to 1920 American car. That era of big open tourers.

TM: So you got to the Grand Canyon and it was full of fog and the clouds were so thick that you drove the Toledo right out across to the North Rim. I don't know, I'm just making something up. What would John Hance say, the world's biggest liar.

CH: The world's biggest liar. I drove right the way down to the bottom of the Grand Canyon...

TM: I drove right across to the North Rim.

CH: I punted across the river in some little barge, and I drove all the way up the other side.

TM: No. It was so cloudy, I just drove right across to the North Rim, right across the clouds.

CH: This is the airport, Valle?

TM: This is Valle airport off to our right, yeah.

CH: It's a good starry, starry night.

NH: Yeah, I can just see a few stars.

CH: Yeah.

TM: Supposed to be nice the rest of the week.

NH: Yeah.

CH: Weren't we lucky weather-wise? Do you think we should postpone? No, we're Brits!

TM: Yeah, right on. We were lucky.

NH: Just a few spots of rain when we were going across the plains.

TM: Yeah. I'll turn the recording off. So we're going to end this interview now and I'm going to push this button.