

## John Packard's 1954 Packard Patrician Travels To Its New Home In Ohio

By Amy Packard Heritage

My mother, Eleanor Packard, my niece, Lilly, and I drove to Ross Miller's shop in Parkton, MD on Friday, July 21, 2006, to pick up the 1954 Packard Patrician, which was part of John Packard's, my father, antique car collection. Ross had spent many hours reassembling the car in preparation for our taking it home to Toledo, OH.

When we arrived, Ross gave us a quick introduction to the car (including a run down on all the treasures - manuals and spare parts - in the trunk), and then we went for a test drive. Six-year old Lilly was quite pleased to be the first of my father's grandchildren to ride in the newly refurbished car. Ross took us down tree-covered winding roads, much like the back roads of Maryland that my father had always preferred for driving and bicycling.

When it was time for us to leave the shop, my mother got behind the wheel of my Toyota and I got behind the wheel of the Patrician. Mom managed to get the windshield wipers going and the headlights on before she located the parking brake release. When she seemed ready, I gave the Patrician some gas and turned the key in the ignition. Ross, who was standing about 20 feet away, nearly jumped out of his skin at the awful grinding noise. I think he may have had some misgivings about relinquishing the result of his weeks of labor to these two women. Still, he smiled gamely, gave me another lesson in how to start an older car, and sent us on our way.

Since Ross' shop is so near the cemetery where my father is buried, we stopped there on our way home. We remembered with appreciation the antique car folks who had made the long, rainy drive to the cemetery on the day of my father's funeral.

The next morning, I drove the car from Stewartstown, PA to Monkton, MD, worrying about the thunder storms with hail that were predicted. As I started down I-83 the weather was nice enough so I drove with the windows rolled down and my shoes off. My father had never approved of barefoot drivers, so I suppose what happened next may have been a message from Dad from beyond. As I drove I felt something tickling my foot and thought that there must be a bug in the car. I just shook my foot and kept driving.



*My father putting plates on the '54 Packard Patrician before driving his new purchase home to Maryland.*

When I arrived at my uncle's house in Monkton, I stepped out of the car, looked in the back seat and saw a little mouse running around! My heroic brother-in-law rescued me by scooping up the mouse in a Frisbee and tossing it into the yard. A few hours later we saw another mouse on the back package tray, which my uncle scooped up and tossed. Since then, I've kept my shoes on in the car!

The thunder and hailstorms never came, but by evening it was raining, and we decided to drive the Packard to my parents' home in Fallston. My husband, Lee, had just arrived from Toledo and was eager to get behind the

wheel of the Packard. I drove ahead in the Toyota, smiling at the picture in my rearview mirror of the green Patrician framed by the wet evening green of the Maryland countryside.

My father's favorite color was green, and I'm sure that was part of this Patrician's appeal for him. Dad was a little color blind, and Ross had pointed out to me that the green paint Dad had ordered for the Patrician was not a perfect match for the original color. Dad had started repainting, and I don't know that the difference bothered him. When Ross was working on the car, he found a pair of fluorescent green seat belts in the trunk. Ross thought they clashed horribly with the interior, but I asked him to install them anyway so that I could use a car seat in the back for my 5-year old son, Evan. The seat belts are a startling contrast to the interior, but it makes me smile to think that Dad probably thought they looked just fine.

On Sunday morning we drove the Packard to Delaware for a test run before our trip to Toledo and so that we could take my father-in-law for a ride in the car. As we started back to Maryland on Sunday afternoon, the car began to make some funny noises and it began to overheat. My husband did some creative driving to get us around the slow-moving Delaware beach traffic and the car seemed to settle down some.

As we were nearing Fallston, the rattling had become a squealing. I suggested that we stop at a park-and-ride that I remembered. We stopped and then decided to proceed, taking the back roads over to I-70 since the car seemed to do better if we stayed under fifty miles per hour. I had given little

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**1954 Packard Travels - continued**

thought to all the trash in the parking lot when we pulled in, but as Lee pulled out of the lot, I saw something venting from the right front tire. We had a flat!

We pulled off onto a side road and, in a cloud of mosquitoes, learned how to use an old-fashioned jack. Our son, Evan, who had insisted on riding only in the Packard, thought this was a great adventure. I called my mother, who was in PA that evening, and told her our situation. I fretted that we would be far from help if we continued on and had more trouble. She reassured me by giving me names and phone numbers of Packard owners who might be helpful along the way from Fallston to Pittsburgh. I wondered how Dwight Heinmuller in Sparks, my Uncle Charlie in Frederick, Dale Meese in Cumberland, and Dave English in Gettysburg, might respond if we called them in the middle of the night! We drove on without incident until midnight, stopping at a hotel in Bedford, PA.

Almost as soon as we were on the road the next morning, we knew we were going to have trouble. The generator light came on and the speedometer stopped working. These new problems caused Lee to suspect that we were burning up a bearing. We stopped at a rest area, and Lee kept the Packard running while I called my mother. As it happened, she was in Fallston for the day, and Paul and Ginny Habicht were visiting when we called. He and Lee conferred about the generator light and agreed that we should keep the car running since we might not be able to restart it if we turned off the engine. At that point I got on my cell phone (how did Packard enthusiasts survive before the age of the cell phone?) and called AAA. Over the phone, I was able to upgrade to gold service. I told Lee that, if he could get us within 100 miles of

Toledo, we could get a free tow home. We finally limped into Toledo on our own about ten hours later, grateful to be home. Through the whole, long ordeal, on that warm July day, our son had ridden quite happily in the back of the Packard. I began to think that he may have his grandfather's car gene.

We had made arrangements to garage the car across the street from our house in a rental property owned by Tom Davis, a Toledo area Packard owner. We didn't yet have the keys, so we parked the Patrician in our recently built garage addition. It fit with about an inch to spare, and I felt a bit



*Lee, Evan & Amy Heritage with the 1954 Packard, which came out of winter storage in Ohio for this photo.*

nostalgic for my parents' home as the smell of oil and gasoline wafted into our family room from the garage.

After talking with some Motor City Packard club members and several other Packard owners in the area, we decided to take the car to Jim Giles at a local Corvette shop. He has rebuilt the generator and replaced the battery, which was spraying acid pretty vigorously. He adjusted the trunk lid so that it would latch and installed the radio antenna. The radio still doesn't operate and we haven't yet solved the speedometer problem, but the car seems to run well, and we feel that we have gotten connected to a good mechanic who can help us maintain the car. We

were able to take Mom, and all the grandchildren for rides when we gathered for Thanksgiving in Toledo.

We recently peeked at the Patrician in its garage to make sure it was OK, and are now waiting for the snow to melt so we can take it for a spin.

The Packard automobiles that the family kept from John Packard's collection found new homes with his children. Daughter Laura Packard Hulseley has the 1937 Packard limousine at her home in Gatchelville, PA. Son Johnny will take the 1947 Clipper to Lake Geneva, WI, after some restoration work by Ross Miller.

We are grateful to Ross and the many antique auto friends who have helped us as we work to preserve my father's cars for the next generation of Packards. I believe he would be proud and pleased that his children have shown such enthusiasm for his beloved automobiles. He would also be grateful, but not surprised, by the

generous spirit that so many antique auto friends have shown our family over the past year.

The Patrician was produced during model years '51 thru '54 and with the 127 in. wheelbase was considered the Senior car. The Patrician also was the basis for the custom bodied Henny models. 1954 was the last year for the straight 8 engine.

**Specifications**

**1954 Packard Patrician  
Touring Sedan, model #5452**

**Production: 2,769**

**Wheelbase: 127 in.**

**Weight: 4,190 lbs.**

**Engine: 359 cu. in., straight 8 with  
nine main bearings, L head,  
212 HP @ 4000 RPM**

**List Price: \$3,344**

*Ask the daughter who owns one!*