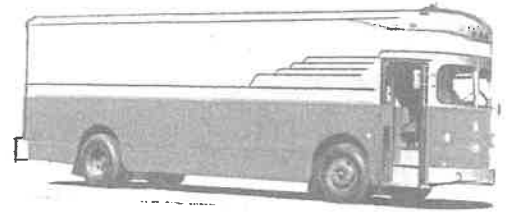


MY TRIP IN AN UNFORGETTABLE TRUCK!



By Sam Cooper

I wrote this story for the Antique Truck Historical Society which was published in their April, 1986 issue. It's about a cross country trip I took with my older cousin in August, 1960 from Kent, Ohio to San Diego, California, with a somewhat 'one of-a-kind' 1951 Fageol Super Freighter van. It was actually one of about a dozen units like it ever made. I had never heard of one before this in 1960, and rarely ever found anyone that has ever known of their existence. I only got one blurry photo of it back then. Hardly any photos of this special long wheelbase unit exists today, even scanning all over the internet.

My story as published in the ATHS Magazine in 1960. "I was a farm boy just out of high school and hadn't been very far from home. My cousin, Jim Newcome, was looking for someone to help him drive a truck to California on a time restraint schedule. He was hired by a successful businessman friend to drive the rig and haul some of his "personal" items. When Jim asked me if I could be a co-driver, I quickly said, "Yes!" Of course he was assuming that I had driven more than an old pick-up through fields and cow pastures, and I was answering "Yes" that I wanted to see the Golden west! Just think of it! All of my expenses would be paid too! My chance of a lifetime! All I had to do is get from Fombell, Pa. to Kent, Ohio.

Well the day of departure finally arrived. When I got my first look at what we would be driving and living in for a week, I was speechless. I had never seen anything like it before in my life! Jim described some of the features of this 1951 Fageol Super Freighter. It was made in Kent, Ohio by the Twin Coach Company. It was a converted Fruehauf 36' stainless box trailer with steering gear in the front and was powered by a 6 cylinder Leyland diesel engine laying on its side under the center of the van body. A 5 speed gear box with an electric two speed axle drove the rear tandems.

If it wasn't enough to make a young farm kid nervous, then what was hooked on behind was! Part of the hauling agreement included towing a trailered hydroplane. So, there it was. Nicely strung out, 59 1/2' long with the hydroplane 10" wide. Ignorant of any 'over width - length' laws, we were to experience some exciting times ahead!

We crawled up into the cab, got comfortably seated, and set our sights westward. We agreed to take turns driving, with Jim taking the reins first. (He had driven it before). With the enclosed cab /open van combination, we could walk freely throughout the whole rig. This feature had a slight drawback though. When we stopped at truck stops, we noticed that we both had oily gray complexions. The van floor & walls weren't air tight against the diesel smoke from below!

I soon got the hang of driving the rig somewhat, and Jim and I enjoyed motoring along while others did the rubbernecking. Things were going great until we were nearing downtown Indianapolis. We noticed a fast approaching bridge overpass showing a maximum height of 4" lower than our van roof. What to do? Jim had me jump out and stop traffic while he would try to maneuver and back up the 36' tractor with 23' trailer in tow. After about 15 minutes of horn blowing, cussing, and hand signals by others, we got the 'spectacle' onto a side street. We headed to an alternate route. With a crumpled old road map, we decided to take Route 40 southwest to Route 66, and on to San Diego. (no Interstate roads at this time).

The miles were exhilarating as we passed everything on the road except Greyhound busses. The Leyland six cylinder diesel had plenty of power and the van had good speed largely because of our light load. (story continued on next page)

Fageol Twin Coach Co. was most widely known for the manufacturing of urban busses from the 1930's to 1970's. They also made many small vans for milk and mail deliveries. The medium size vans similar in looks to the one that I describe in my story, were very popular for use in the moving industry in the 50's & 60's using IHC parts & engines.

Perhaps the most interesting vehicles that they made were the Fageol Cargo Liners. The prototypes in 1950 were similar to the Super Freighter that I drove, with the exception that it had dual tandem steering wheels on the front! Story has it that it rolled and crashed on the test course, with that design never to be visited again. I found photos of it on the internet. What a monster! Search it out sometime. Sam



While cruising through Oklahoma and Texas, Jim related some of the Fageol story as he knew it: The owner of 'our' rig was a descendant of the original Fageol family of Oakland, California. He was very fond of hydroplane racing and high performance boat engines, which the company manufactured. (A nicely painted Fageol emblem and the words "Fageol Marine Engines graced the red and white trim on the van's sides.) Fageol & Leyland became involved together somewhere along the line. But I never bothered to research the details.

Pressing towards New Mexico, all was well until the air compressor for the air brakes developed a leak. We ^{WERE} ~~were~~ holding about 50 PSI and figured that we could make it the rest of the way if we were careful. Besides, we only had a small box of hand tools on board. I was at the wheel driving at night time when nearing Tucumcari, I missed the downshift on the 2-speed. Relying on brakes only, we rolled clankety- clankety right through stoplights and all, with the compressor gasket blown out. We managed to get it repaired the next day at a nearby garage. By this time word was travelling fast ahead of us for others to be on the 'look-out' for a weird rig & similar operators!

As an innocent farm kid, I was quickly learning new terms and words, such as: weigh station, Gila monsters, oversize load, port of entry, and "Where the h--- do you think you're going with that thing?" Our luck ran out with "officials" in Vaughn, New Mexico. We had to drop the hydroplane & trailer and rent a space to store it before we could proceed any farther. We figured that at least we were rid of our last hassle by now. But, agents just inside the Arizona border at the first weigh station somewhat took us as smugglers of stolen goods! Oh yes, I forgot to mention that our cargo consisted of an all- aluminum Ferrari sports car, two Allison aircraft engines, several new unheard of big screen TV's, and other interesting items.

Cousin Jim was a good talker, but I really believe that the hungry weary look on our faces was the clincher. They let us go and by this time we had used up about all of our 'expense money' for fines, permits, wide load signs, repairs, and fuel. So we took turns sleeping in the Ferrari and ate peanut butter sandwiches to stretch funds.

Eventually, my dreams came true as we crossed the mountains and rolled into San Diego. A quick dip in the Pacific ocean, a trip to Tijuana to buy some leather goods, a full day's layover for Jim to settle business, and we finally bid the '51' Fageol goodbye. We hopped into a '55' Ford station with leaking radiator, and headed north towards the Mojave dessert. Jim had to get back right away to coach his high school football team. But that's another story in and of itself. We drove non-stop, except for pit stops, and made it from San Diego to Kent, Ohio in 53 hours! I got to see a lot of beautiful country, but it was really on the fly! I needed a rest when I got home!

I've often wondered if any of those larger Super Freighters still exist somewhere out there. In any event, I had my 'up close & personal' experience with a remarkably engineered rare truck!"