



Steamboat Slough, its very name evokes the romance of the early Delta. Squint your eyes and you can see the big 248-foot sidewheeler *Yosemite* sloshing up the slough, Sacramento bound with a full load of passengers. Or maybe you can see the steamer *New World* with that rascal Capt. Ned Wakeman at the helm, and still flying the broom to denote its honors as holding the long-standing speed record for a run between Sacramento and San Francisco.

Or maybe you would visualize it during a later era with Frank Parisi running the diesel-powered stern-wheeler excursion boat *Mansion Belle* from Old Sacramento (and later Freeport) to the 58-room Mansion for dinner on the shores of Steamboat Slough. Sure, you know that *Mansion*

Belle started out as the snagboat *Putah*, performed ably as *Chicu San* in the John Wayne movie *Blood Alley*, and considerably later ran as the *Spirit of Sacramento* out of Old Sac'. And these days, the Mansion is called Grand Island Mansion.

Grand Island, now isn't that an auspicious name for a hunk of leveed terra firma. They were thinking big back in those days.

Model A Fords

This area also offers my "most-recommended" asphalt slough cruise as well (see sidebar). I had the pleasure recently of tagging along when a flotilla of some 30 Model A Fords made this cruise, organized by Stockton's John Cammack. It started in the early morn, appropriately

enough at Foster's Bighorn, Main Street, Rio Vista. The town seemed set back in time nearly 70 years with all of those Henry Ford specimens parked along the street.

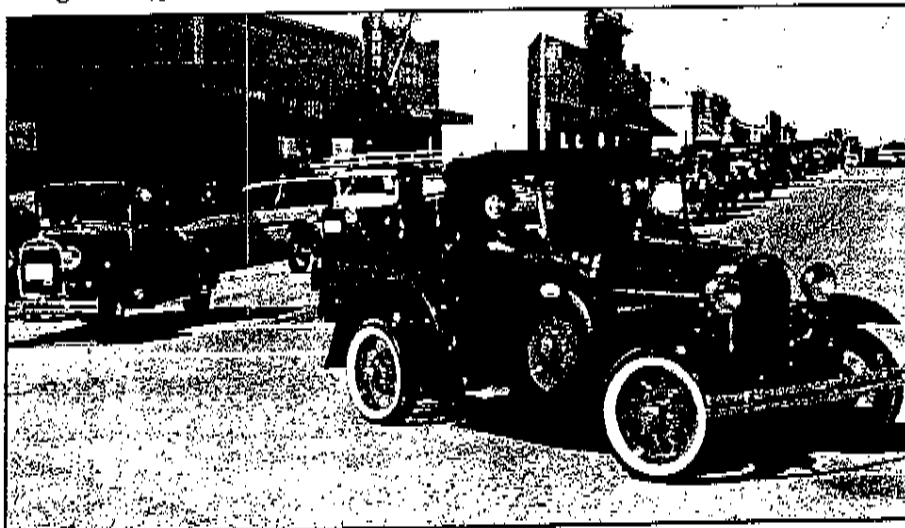
I was pleasantly surprised to find that former Windmill Cove owner Ray Everitt was part of the entourage. Ray has a barn at his Lodi home that is purported to have everything from T-Model and A-Model Fords to Thunderbirds and even an MG-TD stored within. We had a boat berthed at Windmill Cove for a dozen years or so and were like part of the family, but I never did have the opportunity of looking inside that barn — if indeed the barn exists.

After coffee and donuts at Foster's, and some viewing of the fabulous exotic mounted game collection there, we lined up the Model A Fords on the street for a photo opportunity, and then they were off — sedate sedans, roadsters with rumble seats, coupes, and even pickup trucks. Fancy radiator caps, fender-mounted spare tires, luggage racks with trunks on some sterns, toolboxes resting forward. Ah, cars with running boards. The automobile was meant to have running boards.

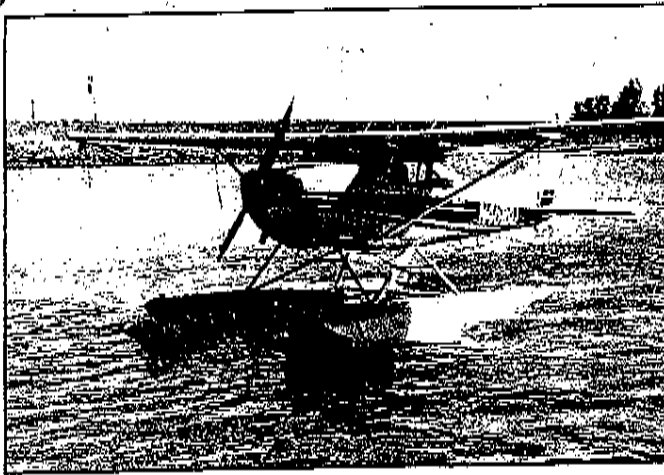
Then they were off, not in a roar, but in a sound so distinct that you would never forget it. Once you have heard the sound of a 4-cylinder Model A Ford engine, it is implanted in your mind forever. It was a long time ago, but I can remember riding in the rumble seat of one of those Model A Fords and listening to that engine sound. When I was a teenager at the end of WWII, thinking about that first car, you could purchase a used Model A for less than \$100. I never owned one. I had a more elegant set of wheels: a battered '34 Chevy.

Ferry Crossings

The long string of Detroit automobiles moved sprightly along the River Road, bound for the Ryer Island Ferry, *Real McCoy*. The ferry tenders had been alerted and there was a plan to squeeze the maximum number of cars aboard for the crossings, three abreast and six deep, I believe. *Real*



In Rio Vista, Model A Fords for as far as the eye can see.

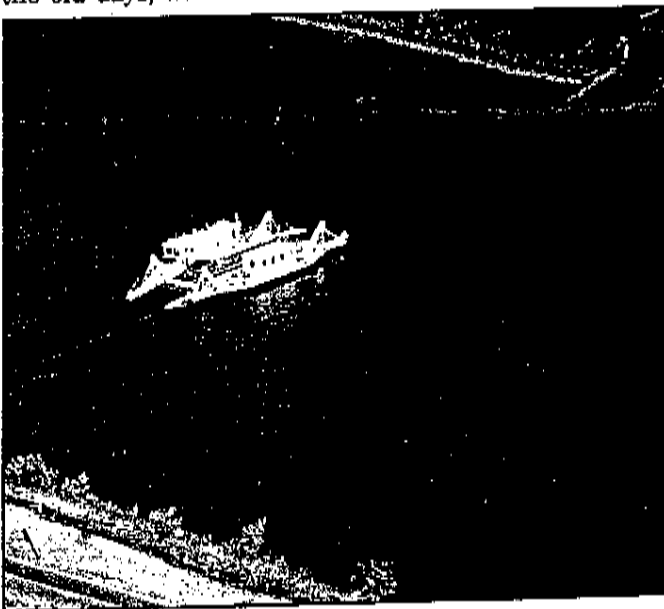


A seaplane negotiates Steamboat Slough.

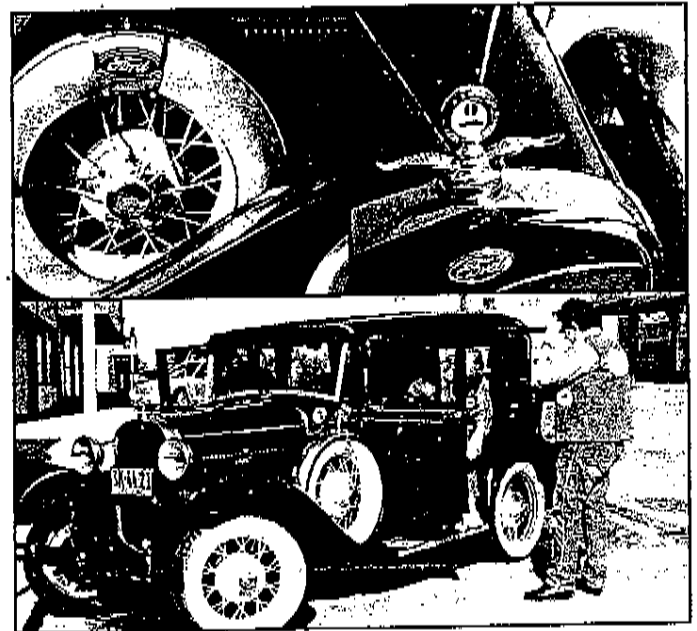
are very popular with folks on bicycles.) Heading west on Hwy 12 over the Rio Vista Bridge, take the first right turn after crossing the bridge and follow signs to the Ryer Island Ferry. The *Real McCoy* ferry will take you over Cache Slough to Ryer Island. The ride is free. You might see a freighter either heading to or returning from the Port of Sacramento.

Turn right after exiting the ferry and follow the winding levee road. It will lead you to the lower end of Ryer Island. It then makes an easy U-turn to take you up the waters of historic Steamboat Slough.

You'll pass Snug Harbor on your right, a comfortable Marina and RV park situated on a tree-shaded island accessed by a private bridge. If you continue along the levee road, you'll come upon the *J-Mack*, a cable-guided ferry that will give you a free ride across Steamboat Slough. After exiting the ferry on the opposite shore, you can turn right and proceed for a mile or so to the county-operated Hogback Park, a beautiful tree-shaded park with launching and areas ideal for picnicking. Hog's Back, as it was called in the old days, was a nefarious sandbar that in its time



J-Mack, the Steamboat Slough cable ferry.



Model A Goodies.

snagged many a steamboat.

Backtrack now, passing the ferry landing heading upstream on Steamboat. You'll pass the 58-room Grand Island Mansion, straight out of a movie about the antebellum south. You can enjoy Sunday brunch here. It also has a boat dock. Continuing up the slough, you will meet the Sacramento River at the mouth of the slough. Cross Steamboat Slough over an aged double-leaf bascule-type drawbridge, and then proceed upriver, now on the Sacramento River's west bank. Turn right at the next bridge and cross over the river. On the far side of the bridge, if you turn left and take a little aside, you'll find sleepy Courtland, the pear capital of the universe. They stage the Courtland Pear Fair here every year the last Sunday in July.

If you instead turn right after crossing the bridge, you would meander along the river on Hwy 160, bound for the Chinese hamlet of Locke. The town was built by the Chinese in 1915 when their Chinatown in neighboring Walnut Grove burned. There are art galleries in Locke, and one of the best known saloon-restaurants in the Delta, Al-The-Wop's. Here too is the Dai Loy museum, a resurrected Chinese gambling hall.

Another mile down the asphalt slough brings you to Walnut Grove, former home of the annual Catfish Jubilee the last Sunday in August. There is a collection of interesting restaurants here, and places to shop. Cross the green bascule bridge to the other side of the river, and take a left. You are bound for the two-dog town of Ryde. You can't miss it. There's a big water tower by the 32-room Ryde Hotel, a good place to dine, or stay for a day or a week to maybe play on its smallish 9-hole golf course. Also in Ryde is artist Marty Stanley's Levee Gallery. Marty's around most weekends and perhaps is the Delta's most noted artist.

Snug Harbor, 916/775-1455; Grand Island Mansion, 916/775-1705; Ryde Hotel, 916/776-1318.