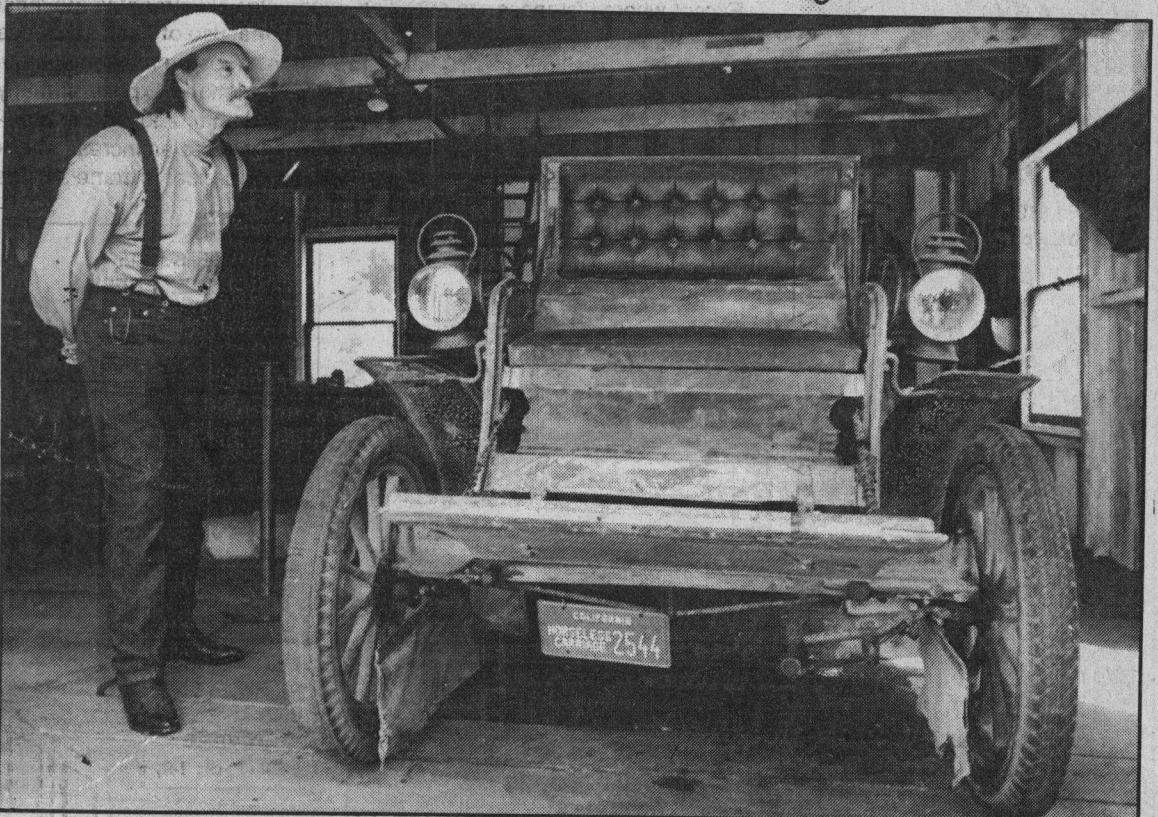


WILDER RANCH

A Wilder day

5541



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel photos

Lester Markarian checks out a 1903 Knox, the first gas-powered car in Santa Cruz County

Open house allows a fun look back to a slower era

By TOM LONG
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — It was open house at Wilder Ranch State Park Saturday. Hundreds of people came to the old ranch to eat, look through greying buildings and barns and watch horses be shod and quilts be quilted.

"You gotta talk to 'em when you pick up their foot so they know what's going on," said a man in overalls as he lifted a horse's foot and prepared to alter its footwear. Nearby, women walked about in old-fashioned gingham dresses and bonnets, and cowboys-for-a-day strutted about in long coats and boots.

There were tables sporting elaborate, handmade dolls, brownies for sale and old bottle collections. Two bonneted women played music, one strumming a banjo, one sawing away at a fiddle.

Tucked over in a corner of the ranch, away from the center of activity, a steady stream of people stopped by a beat-up wooden garage. The object of their attention was dusty, ragged and looked every hour of its 88 years.

It was a 1903 Knox, the first gasoline-powered car driven in Santa Cruz County, purchased by the Wilder family when brand new.

"It would be a sacrilege to restore this car," said John Machi, a docent at the park and antique car enthusiast. "It's too historical. There's probably not more than a half dozen in existence."

Certainly no one has attempted such sacrilege recently. The old car — which is made of wood — is a faded red, with leather



Beth Chaparral played the fiddle during open house.

fenders and kerosene lamps for headlights. The tires are a bit bigger than bicycle tires. The car has two forward speeds, a tiller instead of a steering wheel and a hand throttle.

"Top speed was about 20 mph," said Machi. "But for 1903, that was flying."

Not only was this car speedy in its time, it was also fashionable.

"It was considered the height

of style in those days to have a buggy with patent leather fenders," said Machi. "So when they made this car they included patent leather fenders."

The patent leather is now more like shredded leather. Anyone going 20 mph on a highway is likely to be ticketed for going too slow. And few women wear bonnets on a daily basis.

But it can be fun to look back. And that's what the open house was all about.