The Good Old Days vs The Present

We oldsters enjoy recalling the “good old days” but when it comes to convenience, we really prefer the present. There are so many gadgets nowadays that make our lives so much more comfortable and, let’s face it, more enjoyable as well!

Hardly any of us remember when cars didn’t have radios in them, but there was such a time.

Back in the 1920’s two fellows named Elmer and Bill were sitting in a car atop a scenic overlook, spooning with their girlfriends. Suddenly, one of the ladies mentioned that music would be a wonderful accompaniment to their romantic evening.

That remark sparked something in the two young men’s minds. Both were blessed with inventive spirits and enjoyed tinkering around with machines. In no time they were involved in taking radios apart, fashioning smaller inner parts and inserting them into smaller frames, in order to develop a radio little enough to be installed in an automobile. Finally, the two tinkerers came up with a prototype, but as fast as they would get one problem solved another would present itself. For example, where could they install the car’s radio? In the trunk, maybe? Under the seats?

The solution was to install it in the car’s dashboard. However they soon discovered that the electrical connections in the car caused static to come through the radio’s speaker system. Through trial and error, the two resourceful young men found ways to eliminate the interference caused by the electrical connections.

They realized that a separate battery system to run the radio had to be developed, but then there was another problem. Car radios can’t remain stationary like home radios can, so there had to be a device that would accommodate movement. The solution was to attach an aerial to the car that could pick up the radio waves.

Overjoyed with their success the young inventors took their car radio to a radio convention in Chicago, and by chance met Paul and Joseph Galvin, owners of a manufacturing company. Realizing the potential in Elmer and Bill’s invention, the Galvin brothers encouraged their investors to financially back the car radio.
During those days, the suffix “ola” had become popular (as in Victrola and Pianola), so the name Motorola seemed appropriate for the first motor car radio. In 1930, Motorola car radios began to be mass produced and Motorola Incorporated became a huge success.

And who were those two young tinkerers?

Elmer Wavering continued his work with Motorola, later becoming president of the company. He considered the alternator, which led to the development of automotive air conditioning systems, his greatest invention.

"The radio may have made the car fun," he once said, but the alternator "made everything else possible."

During World War II Wavering helped to produce quartz crystals for military radios and led in the development of radar systems. He was inducted to the Automotive Hall of Fame and was often cited as a leader of distinction.

Wavering’s association with his friend William Lear continued, although their careers went in separate directions. Lear joined the Magnavox Corporation for a few years, working on amplifiers for speaker systems, and the miniaturization of radios, leading to the development of the transistor radio. He also produced the 8-track music cartridge before turning his attention to aviation.

Lear had bought his first aircraft in 1931 and was fascinated by the challenges of radio direction and avionic devices. He founded Lear Developments, later renaming the company Lear Inc. After several moves, financial losses and name changes, Lear began to build corporate aircraft with jet engines. The Lear jet led the way to more avionic developments.

William Lear was inducted to the National Aviation Hall of Fame and also received the Tony Janus award for his outstanding work in the industry.

And, whatever happened to the young lady who sparked the inventive spirits of Wavering and Lear? Well, she must have become another man’s inspiration, because she didn’t become Mrs. Wavering or Mrs. Lear.