

# Transcribed Excerpts from "The Automobile Age" from *The Goldfinch*, November 1982

## The Way to Go

### Excerpt 1

Back in 1900 horses provided power for most travel. People usually thought in terms of ten-mile trips. If they wanted to go farther, they planned to take a train. Railroad depots were usually no more than ten miles from where a person lived. Trains came and went often. For example, in the town of Jefferson there were seven westbound and six eastbound trains daily...

### Excerpt Two

Most people had lived their whole lives within a few square miles, acquainted only with a few neighbors and those in the nearby town. These same people could now travel to visit faraway relatives. They could also travel to other areas of the country to see firsthand how others lived...

### Excerpt Three

Because it was possible to travel a long distance in a short time, education improved, especially for students living in rural areas. For many years children attended country schools within walking distance of their farms. These schools, however, only went through the eighth grade. High schools were most often located in towns, and the chances of attending them were much better for town children than for those living on farms. Students from farms often boarded in town which meant they could not help out at home. There was also the expense of board and room. With an automobile, students could live in the country, drive to and from school every day, and still help on the farm...

### Excerpt Four

Even before automobiles, rural schools had begun to consolidate. This meant the students needed to be transported several miles from home to the consolidated school. Horse-drawn wagons served as the first buses, but before the end of the 1920s faster motor-powered buses had replaced the old horse-drawn hacks...

### From "Truckin' Along"

### Excerpt Five

With the coming of gasoline-powered trucks things could be moved from one place to another more quickly. Iowa farmers found that trucks were very useful...

### **Excerpt Six**

Because trucks could provide door-to-door service, people began to use them instead of the railroads for long-distance hauling. It seemed more sensible to load the product just one time on a truck instead of the two times needed for railroad transport. After World War II ended (1945) the number of trucks hauling the nation's goods increased greatly...

### **From "Pulling Out of the Mud"**

#### **Excerpt Seven**

Road making had to change after automobiles came into use. Before automobiles, most roads were just plain dirt. Some states had a few miles of "improved" roads. This meant roads surfaced with stone, gravel or shells. In 1900 about 20 to 30 automobiles per day might travel over a road at no more than eight miles per hour. By 1920, however, the number of cars on that same road increased to 750 each day, traveling at speeds up to 30 miles per hour. While two tons was the heaviest load in 1900, trucks in 1920 could haul loads of 10 to 14 tons. Yet, the road had changed very little.

Gravel had been considered a good road surface until automobiles came. But the weight and speed of cars loosened the gravel and pushed it down into the dirt or off to the side of the road. Gravel was all right for less-used roads, but on main highways concrete was the best surface. Concrete cost more than other surfaces, but it lasted well. Also, tests had proven that tires wore out five times faster on gravel than on concrete. Rough, bumpy roads caused damage and breakdowns. It cost less money per mile to operate a car on a concrete, paved road than on dirt or gravel.