

## Goodbye Auto-Train, hello Auto-Log: Trucking cars

**JERSEY CITY, N.J.** — When word came that a financial cave-in had derailed Auto-Train Corp., the Autolog Corp. was nearly stopped in its tracks by desperate callers seeking a way to get their cars out of Florida.

"Our phones literally have been ringing off the hook," said a beleaguered Autolog president, Myron Levine, from his headquarters in Jersey City, N.J.

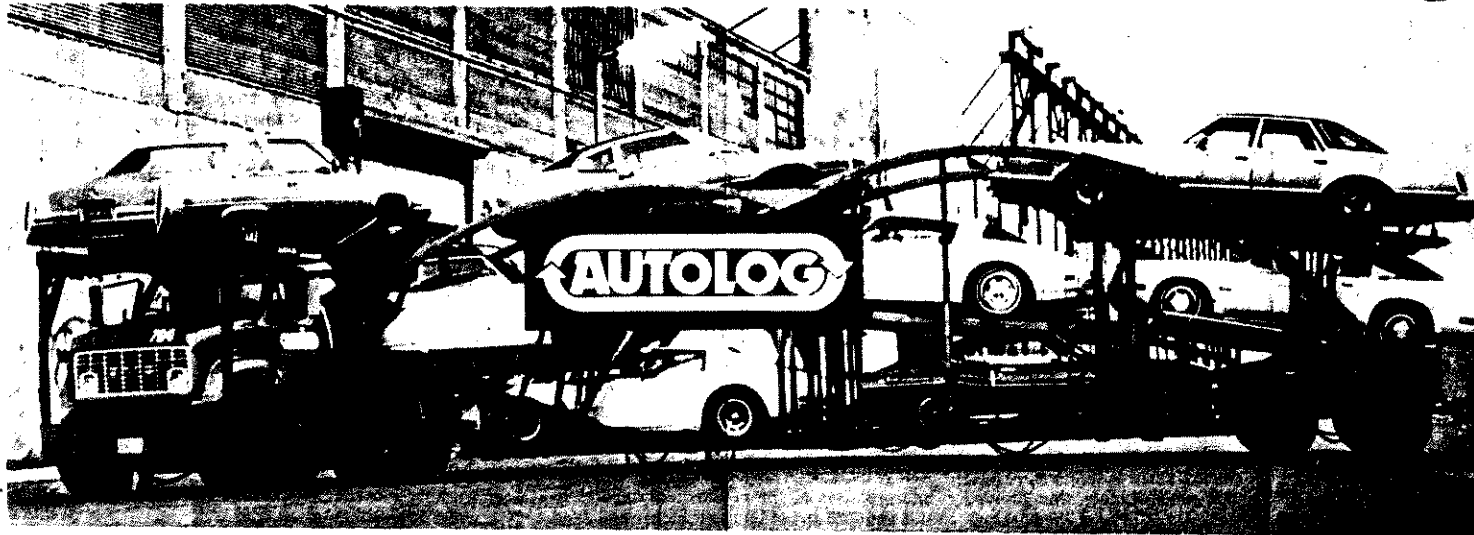
Instead of carrying automobiles by train, Levine's company hauls them by truck. And when scores of Auto-Train customers found themselves holding tickets to nowhere, his four-year-old firm suddenly became the key to their salvation.

"People have been calling in desperation," he said. "We put on extra trucks to handle the volume, but we don't have enough telephone lines. There is a substantial number of retired people — many said they don't feel physically capable of driving."

In Dania, where Autolog has a terminal outside the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport, "the phone has never stopped," says manager Jim Simpkins. "Mostly it's been from people who are six months out of the year."

**Some satisfaction**  
Despite the incredulity in Levine's voice, there was more satisfaction than met the ear.

For Levine expected Autolog to take in a record of \$5



million this year. With Auto-Train gone, he's expecting more.

As it was, 1980 was a watershed year for Autolog. Its 40 trucks transported nearly 20,000 vehicles, and he obtained authority to go nationwide.

That network, however, didn't come easily. Ironically, part of the problem was linked with the well-being of Auto-Train.

Since 1974, the former Securities and Exchange Commission lawyer had to fight the Interstate Commerce Commission every time he sought to expand. Obtaining authority to operate at all meant a trip through the ICC's jungle of red tape.

"I was in a Catch-22 situation," he says. "I didn't have the trucks, employees and the terminals. And I couldn't prove it could be done profitably."

The ICC feared that as Autolog grew, Auto-Train would suffer. If Levine had failed, the reasoning went, there was a risk that he would take Auto-Train into the abyss with him.

**Fears prophetic**  
Those fears turned out to be prophetic, and Levine probably knew it. But he wasn't about to buy the scenario of them both going down together.

And now, as Auto-Train officials struggle with refund inquiries, Levine has his own version of his former

rival's obituary.

"We're one of the reasons Auto-Train went under," he says. "What they really had was a do-do bird waiting for extinction. They couldn't navigate the tunnels to Washington, and had to locate in Virginia."

The Auto-Train concept

caught on 10 years ago because it was a necessity, he says. "Any driving the elderly could save was important."

But then came the lower air fares. With them, "why drive?" They had a fixed overhead, and any business

lost came from profits." Another factor: "They were locked into their two terminals."

They were able to survive because they could provide halfway decent service. But they couldn't compete with people like Autolog," he says.

### Coming to Albany area

**Knew Washington**

That competition was borne out of Levine's knowledge of Washington.

When he was first rejected by the ICC, he took his case before congressional committees that were attempt-

ing to deregulate the trucking industry.

In 1976, he was granted restricted authority to operate between New York City and Broward, Dade and Palm Beach counties.

"We set up facilities in Fort Lauderdale, Miami and West Palm Beach at the airports," he says. "A person could fly in and have his car waiting for him. There was a tremendous amount of business right off the bat."

Instead of driving 500 miles to Auto-Train's Lorton, Va. terminal, a vacationer in Florida could place his car aboard a truck, and then wing his way to South Florida a few days later.

The car would be there when he arrived.

Meanwhile, his counterpart using Auto-Train would disembark at its Sanford terminal and still have a lengthy drive to his destination.

**Broader authority**  
In 1977, Levine applied for broader authority when Pratt and Whitney made a major move of its employees from Connecticut.

He then sought permission to operate in the midwest and all of the northeast.

Once, again, with Auto-Train protesting, the ICC denied the bid on the basis of insufficient consumer support.

This time, Levine found

himself in a federal appeals court contesting the administrative decision. In doing so, he brought the Justice Department into the case because the U.S. government was a defendant. But instead of opting for the ICC's defense, he says, Justice filed a brief attacking the ICC decision as unreasonable.

The victory opened up Boston, Hartford, New Jersey, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh in the northeast, and Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland and Columbus in the midwest.

Using car rental agencies as pickup and dropoff points, business accelerated from \$2.4 million in revenues in 1978 to \$2.8 million in 1979. Expansion to Tampa, St. Petersburg and Sarasota pushed revenues to \$3.5 million in 1980.

**Other customers**  
Retirees aren't the only customers of Autolog. With nationwide authority, he's been able to help corporations move their employees by transporting their cars.

Autolog also has a contract to move the new DeLorean sports cars off the docks at Wilmington, Del., once they arrive from Ireland. The company will be serving the south, Levine says, with the first shipments of DeLoreans due in Florida by June.

Autolog services will be available in the Albany area starting in September. Reservations may be made by calling 800-526-6078.