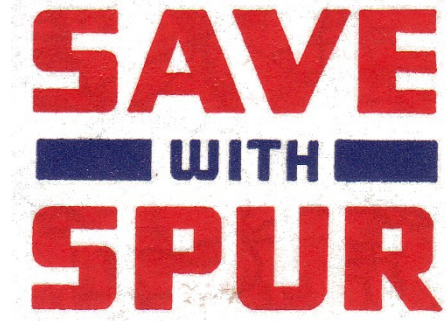


Spur Oil Company Maps

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Spur... History & Maps

by Walt Wimer, Jr. RMCA #7

Several years back we entered a new millennium and with that how many “independent” gasoline brands are ‘still around from the 1920s or even the 30s?? Sure, we have major brands such as TEXACO, SHELL, GULF and SINCLAIR that can trace their beginnings back that far - -but how many smaller brands have survived that long?? I don’t have a count, but I can tell you that it is darn few. One that has survived that long is SPUR, and it has been a rather historical brand as well, as back in the 20s & 30s the Spur brand pretty much revolutionized gasoline marketing.

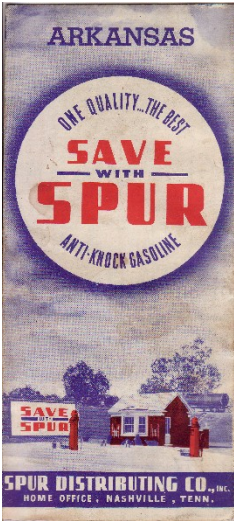
Sure there had been “discount” gasoline brands before Spur arrived on the scene, but prior to this Tennessee based brand, few had built’ a multi-state chain of stations such as Spur Distributing Co. did prior to World War II. In 1928 John Mason Houghland, a former Gulf Oil employee, founded Spur Distributing Co. and opened his first station in Old Hickory, Tennessee, a suburb of Nashville. -Houghland believed he could retail large amounts of gasoline at lower prices and with no frills. The concept worked!! The name of his company came from the old railroad “spur” tracks on which gasoline was delivered to many of his early stations. Others such as Tankar, Dixie, Vim, and Red Head-Fair Price were quick to jump on the idea of rail car to highway car, but none were as successful as Spur Distributing Company.

By the end of 1932 Spur had over 100 stations in operation. To gain financing to expand even further, Houghland worked a deal with a Swiss Corporation, Uebersee Finanz, which was under control of the German von Opel family. This worked out quite well.....for a while. By the early 1940s there were about 265 Spur stations in operation. But then history played a cruel card to Mr. Houghland; World War II!! The U. S. government seized the company as “alien property” in 1942 due to its German connections. From then until 1958, after many court battles, Houghland regained control of his company. Expansion had been slow during the years the government had control and the chain had only increased to around 300 stations when Houghland regained control. Unfortunately, Mr. Houghland passed away on April 25, 1959 and never had long to enjoy all of his efforts in regaining control of his company.

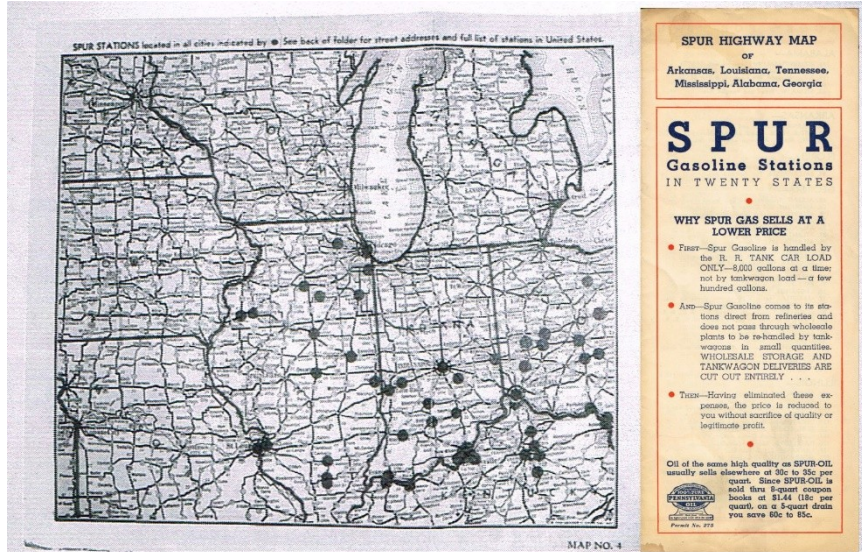
The third chapter of Spur history really begins in 1960 when Murphy Corporation bought Spur from those who owned the company after Houghland's passing. Murphy was an oil exploration company which had nothing in refining or marketing until 1957 when they bought River States Oil Company of Evanston, Ill. River States had a small refinery in Superior, Wisconsin and a limited marketing operation. Murphy updated the company's brand image with the new "R S Royal" brand and had some 150 sites under that brand name when they bought Spur. Those stations were rebranded to Spur and the company now had a refinery and over 500 stations.

More expansion for Murphy would follow with several other companies and even a move into the Canadian market. The biggest of their takeovers was Ingram Oil & Refining Co. which had some 200 additional stations and a refinery at Meraux (New Orleans) LA, a refinery they continue to operate today. While Spur had always been a company owned chain, Murphy, who now owned two refineries, began to sign up jobbers and independently owned gas stations. The 1960s were boom times for the company as the Spur brand grew to around 2,000 stations in the United States and Canada. They even went overseas with an English operation under the Murco brand name which continues today. But then came the so-called "Energy Crisis" of the 1970s and things began to go the other way for the Spur brand. Jobbers and independent stations left the brand for more "secure" supply from the larger major brand refiners.

By the 1980s we were into the beginning of the c-store trend. Many of the older Spur company sites were just not large enough for a full C-store so they began to drop by the wayside as the company closed them one by one. Then Murphy Oil hit a bonanza of a deal with a fellow Arkansas company, the giant Wal-Mart. They would build high volume gasoline sites in Wal-Mart store parking lots!! For the Spur brand this may have been the death knell as the company decided to go with the "Murphy USA" brand name rather than Spur. The Spur brand was relegated to a secondary brand at a shrinking number of lower volume sites. By 2000 they were down to around 300 and my guess is they may be under 200 today. Contrast that to the Murphy USA stations which saw 120 new sites built in 2003 and a 160 more planned for 2004. The average Murphy USA site probably pumps five times or more than most Spur stations, so you do the math!! The Spur brand may be on the endangered species list despite the company's comments that they are committed to retaining the Spur brand for dealer stations. Only time will tell how long Spur will remain an active gasoline brand.



For
the
first
three



Early Spur sectional map (map number 4) list of service stations on reverse - Dave Leach

decades of its life, the Spur brand had an off-and-on map program. The oldest known map is probably around 1937 and is a very plain white cover with no logos. These maps are quite scarce to rare, but at least two RMCA members have them in their collections. A couple of years later the company issued what is probably by far the most popular Spur maps for collectors. These maps are mostly in blue & white with a small Spur cottage station at the bottom. Above the station on a bank is a tank car on railroad spur. These are three panel maps with a big "Save with Spur" on the front and a station location listing on one of the panels. These were late 30s/early 40s maps with a couple of minor variations by Mid-West Map Company. There is an undated version (probably 1938 or 39) and a dated 1940 version.

That was all of the Spur maps until well after the war when they again issued a very plain white generic looking map around 1952. There are at least two variations of this one, a three-panel version in 1952 and an accordion style map in 1953 and maybe later. All wording is done in blue and red with no station listing. On the back cover of the 1952 issue is the wording: "SPUR is the largest independent retailer of gasoline in the world!" That was it for Spur maps until Murphy took over in 1960.

The first map from Murphy was issued right away in 1961 from



Gousha, and includes both the new Spur and RS Royal logos. In fact the Royal logo is above the Spur logo, as maybe at that time they had thoughts of Royal becoming their overall brand. But as we know, that didn't happen. The 1962 issue has just the Spur logo and no mention of Royal. Both maps are white with red, with logos and an outline map of the eastern states with the 24 states they



marketed in highlighted in pink. The 1961 map shows pole signs of both Royal and Spur raising out of the map, but only one such sign in 1962. Both maps show a Murphy Corporation credit card on the back cover, as the new marketing operation was quick to get into that field.

In 1964 Spur issued a full color map by Gousha that shows a photo of a refinery at dawn above a Spur logo with a Service station below. The station, I am quite sure, was one of the former Ingram sites in either Nashville or New Orleans, and shows Spur oval globes on the pumps. By 1967 they had changed the cover somewhat with a different station. This one was a full service three bay ranch style station that was probably located in Florida. This reflected Murphy's thinking at the time of getting away from the "gas only" concept of Spur Distributing and Ingram, and into full service dealer type stations. Times would change!! Both these maps featured Spur blending pumps on the back cover and even Spur batteries in 1967. Mr. Houghland probably rolled over in his grave!!

In the early 1970s Spur took a page from several of their major brand competitors and issued maps from Rand McNally with scenic covers featuring full cover color photographs. Only three versions are known: 1) an interstate highway at dawn or dusk (take your pick). 2) a swamp/river scene with a car and mountains in the background. 3) an early morning beach scene with a mother and small boy with sea gulls flying above. I don't know of any pattern on what scenes were used for what states, but they clearly didn't have a cover for every state they issued. Later on, about 1973, they issued at least the interstate cover, but from Gousha, with changes to the back cover advertising. It is possible that these were only issued on a regional basis such as "Eastern United States", rather than state issues.



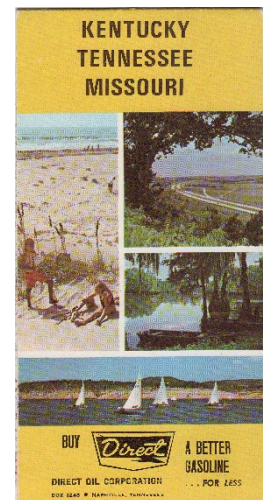
In the mid-seventies the company tried a reverse logo for a short period. Thus the letters appeared in red rather than the blue used since 1961, and the curved area around the "spur" was changed to blue. This reverse logo was reflected in what appears to be Murphy's last map effort and is one of their scarcer covers. This map is an undated issue by the National Survey Co. in Chester, Vermont, but is believed to have been issued in 1977. As a sign of the times, on the cover we find a high volume C-store with self-serve gas. Follow the changes: small cottage station, high volume "gas only" site, full serve station with three bays and then a self-serve C-store. Really signs of the times!! The evolution of Spur gas stations!!!

As a couple of notes to Spur maps, Murphy Oil also issued Murco brand maps in both England and Sweden. Both are scarce, even in Europe and pretty rare in US collections. Although Murphy did market in Canada under the Spur brand, no Canadian maps are known. Both River States and Ingram issued maps prior to the Murphy takeover and the rebranding of their stations to Spur. River States

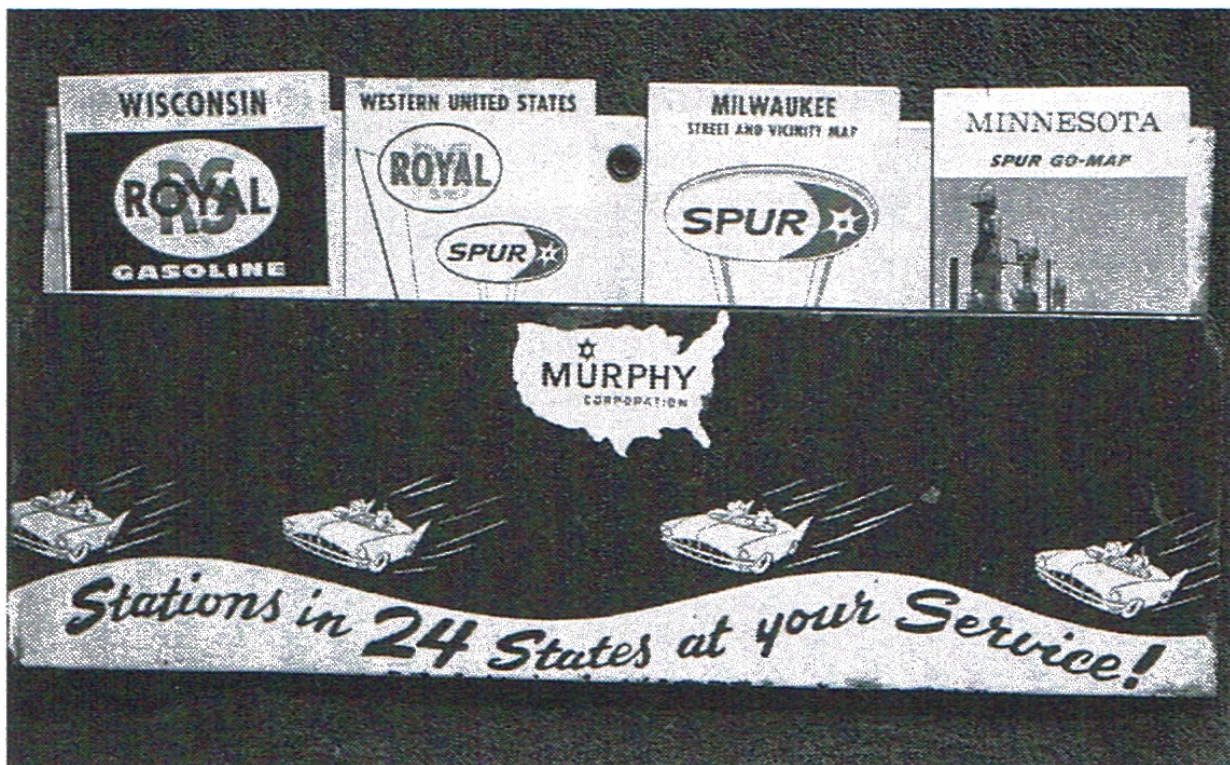
issued two map covers, a generic with no logos and one around the Murphy takeover of Spur which shows the RS Royal logo. Ingram and its predecessor Wood River Oil & Refining both issued maps, with the 1940s Wood River maps the scarcest of the bunch.

Before closing, it would probably of interest to mention Direct Oil Co., which was founded in 1937 by Calvin Houghland, John Mason Houghland's son. His company grew slowly at first, having only five Stations by the war and just 28 by 1951. The interesting thing about the Direct stations was that they had Direct on the pumps and globes, but Spur signage. I can remember as a school student in the 1950s being quite confused by that and the fact that the "Spur" stations had red pumps and the Direct stations white. Direct grew quickly in the 1950s and there is a belief that the plan was to use Direct for the start of rebuilding a new company if John Mason Houghland lost his court fight with the government, and also that they planned to merge the two companies once Houghland won control of Spur Distributing Co. But that didn't happen when the elder Houghland passed away in 1958 and Spur was sold to Murphy.

Direct continued to grow and had well over 100 stations when it was sold to Tenneco in 1962. Direct was still a Tenneco secondary brand when that company got out of the oil business in 1988. Since that time it has gone through several hands with the brand still in existence at a couple of North Carolina stations in 2004. Direct did issue two maps, a SIGMA issue in the late 60s/early 70s and one stand-alone of about 1966 vintage. Both are rather scarce!!



| worked at a Spur station in Anderson, SC in 1960-61 right about the time of the Murphy takeover, so the brand has always been a very collectible one for me. In closing | want to thank my long-time friend Wayne Henderson of PETROLEUM COLLECTIBLES MONTHLY, who let me use his company history from a 2000 issue to aid with this story. And also Wayne, Jon Roma and Dave Leach, who checked their Spur collections for any illusive maps | did not have, including Dave's 1966 Direct map.



Murphy Map Rack used by Royal and Spur—Dave Leach

Murphy Oil in Europe

By Ian Byrne

Excerpts from Ian's Petrol Maps Website
<http://www.ianbyrne.free-online.co.uk/index.htm>

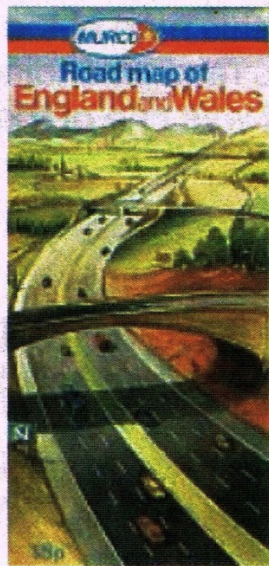
Murphy Oil Corporation started retailing gasoline in the USA in 1957 by acquiring a number of small regional chains. Sensing that expansion might be easier outside the competitive US market, in the 1960s it acquired independents in Canada, Sweden and Britain. Although Murphy consolidated on the Spur brand in North America, the Spur name was owned in Britain by Spurrier Glazebrook, which kept a single station operational in Lancashire, so the *Murco* name was used instead.



Murco Sweden car journal—Jon Roma

The Swedish chain was soon sold to BP, but the British outlets, formed partly from the EP (=European Petroleum) and Olympic branded chains, survive to this day. Olympic was phased out around 1970, but a handful of EP branded stations survived into the 1990s, when it was briefly revived as a discount name. Murco part owns a Welsh refinery, and has developed a niche in community based service stations.

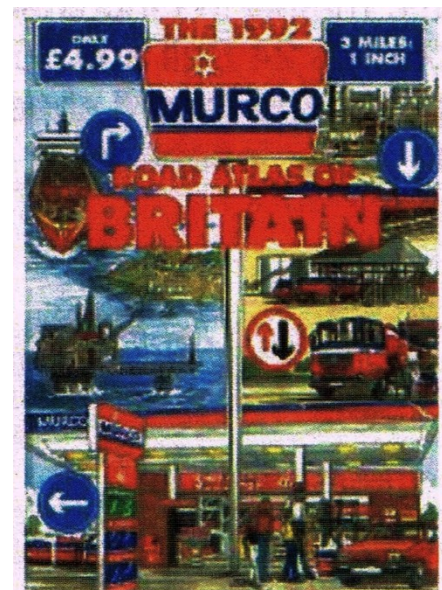
Murco first issued maps in the 1960s when Geographia Ltd prepared a pair covering Britain North and South at 9 miles to the inch. It is not known how regularly Murco issued



maps, for the company supplied under 450 outlets, but by the mid 1970s Geographia's map showed England & Wales on a single sheet at the same scale. The final sheet map - marked as 8th edition (1990) - has all of Britain on a single Bartholomew's sheet, still at 9 miles to the inch. The special offer price was applied as a sticker when the map was on sale at the Murco station in Bear Cross, Bournemouth in autumn 1990. All Murco garages are listed on the 1990 map: company owned ones are named "Murco Service Station" with dealer sites carrying their owner's name.

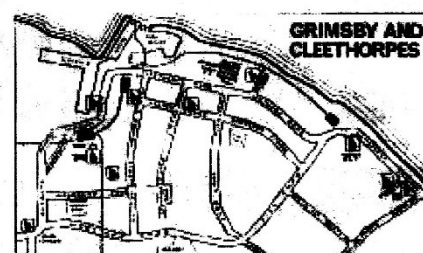
Murco is the only brand to have issued maps throughout the 1990s in Britain, selling a large format (15 inches tall) atlas every year since 1991. The 1992 edition has an extremely busy cover depicting all elements of the Murco operation. The 1999 version, by now spiral bound and the first to use

the new Murco logo. The 2004 edition is the first map found on sale from the centenary year of the petrol company road map. All were produced by Bartholomew at 1:200,000, although the most recent editions credit Collins. Murco atlases also list Murco service station locations, usually on or inside the rear cover. As the price of some competing atlases have fallen, Murco has reacted by taking its atlas upmarket, so that the current version includes not only the basic maps, but 19 urban area maps at 1 inch to the mile and 60 city/town centre plans, including such unusual towns for detailed mapping as Windsor and Weston-super-Mare.



1992

Grimsby-based Bell Oil operations had 46 outlets, mainly in Lincolnshire, when it issued this map of the county in 1972.



This extract (from the Bell-EP map on the front) shows the basic town plan of Grimsby and Cleethorpes, together with the 11 Bell and EP stations in the towns. Town plans were also included for Lincoln and Boston.

Drawn by local firm, Wally Day, it located the county's 24 Bell and 16 EP sites, as well as recommending hotels and restaurants. An unusual feature was a first aid

guide and record sheet for accidents. Bell was one of the first companies to switch to AVIA in 1978, but was bought by the larger independent UK in the mid-1980s.

To view a gallery of all maps referenced in these articles, press this [link](#).