

My Model A Story

By Bob Hughes

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I became interested in antique cars in about 1965 and I have had both Chevys and Fords including a 50 Olds convertible which I wish I still had. Also, I used to have a 60 VW and a 68 Porsche 912. I never had a formal course in auto repairing I just learned from doing things and making mistakes from doing so. I had to do my own repairing because I did not have money to have some one else fix things. I was a member of the Caveman auto club here in Grants Pass and a National Chevy club VCCA. When the local Caveman club went belly up along with other some car clubs, I decided to join the Model A club (Henry's Lady) but did not feel comfortable driving a Chevy among the Model A's, so I purchased a Model A from Southern California. The engine had been rebuilt and the body and upholstery were okay but not perfect (a few warts and pimples) but presentable.

I had this "A" for a while. Then one day when driving it back from Medford things started to go wrong. It went from bad to worse. The engine quit on Monument Drive. I called my son Jim and we towed it home. Upon reviewing what had happened, it was not going to be a simple fix. The engine had to be removed. It was determined that the block was previously cracked and the repair was done by pinning the block (drilling small $\frac{1}{4}$ holes along the crack and inserting pins). Not the best way in my opinion but should have been okay. If my dad was still alive, he could have welded it up. He was a great welder and an even a better dad. I sure do miss him!! I have rebuilt four-cylinder Chevy engines from the 20's and have done the Babbit work using manual line boring equipment also from the 20's. Babbit should be poured at 900 degrees F and the molds pre heated to a few hundred degrees to remove all moisture and prevent the Babbit from cooling too quickly. Babbit at 900 degrees will instantly turn moisture into steam and spray hot metal around the area. Face and eye protection are mandatory when working with Babbit.

Thinking about driving the "A" back from Medford, the problem may have developed because I was pushing the "A" to about 60 mph and it just rebelled. After looking around for an engine, I talked to a guy in Myrtle Creek, Oregon that had a lot of early Ford parts, including Model A engine blocks, so I visited him and purchased a block and proceeded to build an engine. No one in Grant Pass did Babbit, but I figured I could do the work if I had the right equipment. I found a person in Colorado that made manual operating line boring equipment and molds for the Model A's. It cost a few hundred dollars but was less expensive than having the work done. Besides being a DIY guy, I looked forward to the challenge. (I had a positive attitude: if someone else could do the work, then so could I.) I had Peckham Precision Engines fit the pistons, do the valve job, deck the block and head and I did the rest.

Soon after I got the engine back together, I developed Hydrocephalus (water on the brain) which affected my balance, walking and my memory. I just could not do much. I had an operation done by a Neurologist to correct the problem. A small tube was attached to my brain that ran to an adjustable valve on my head. Then a small tube was run under my skin that dumped the excess fluid into my stomach. I don't know how much fluid is generated but I am sure it is not enough to attach a hose bib and water the lawn. The operation helped me a lot, but I still had some problems. But all things

considered, they were very acceptable. I was still upright, sucking air and could eat, pee and poop. What else do you need at the ripe old age of 83, except to drive a Model A .

The engine sat around for a couple of years, I was still a member of the Model A club, so I contacted John Firth an outstanding club member and Model A expert. John suggested that the Busted Knuckles Group, from the Henry's Lady Model A Club, would gladly install the engine in the model A. I did not want others to do the work that I should be doing but with some reluctance, knowing my capability, I agreed and guess what – they did it. I asked John how many guys would show up and he indicated 4 to 6. Guess what, 16 guys showed up and they jumped on the project like a hen on a June bug. They got to work. The team work was amazing; they knew what had to be done and they just did it. They asked me where some parts were but after two years, I had no idea, but they looked around and found them. I was certainly amazed and impressed. Oil and gas were put in the engine and it started right up with no problems, and according to the Model A experts, it sounded great. I was relieved and pleased. Mission accomplished so we went to Baldini's for lunch, camaraderie and tire kicking. I have a deep appreciation for all of the support and work done by the Busted Knuckles Group. A great bunch of knowledgeable guys.

I also appreciate the work done by the Neurologists Drs. Walker and Parker. As a result of their knowledge and surgical skills I can now do some things with little or no difficulty. However, some things are more difficult and I choose not to do some of them. I just have to accept the unacceptable and concentrate on the important things and get on with my life. However, I realize that I must always be careful to avoid falling.

As a result of the excellent job done by the Busted Knuckles Group, I now have a road worthy Model A and intend to become more active in Henry's Lady Model A Club. Also, I thank my wife Barbara and friends for putting up with my continuing idiosyncrasies.