

Parking Lot Mechanics

Or, The Case of the Missing Babbitt

By Bob Hughes

I had my 26 Chevy for several years and had gone on several tours with it. The tours were usually several hundred miles away, so the car was always trailered to the tour location. One tour was in Glacier National Park, so the car was loaded onto my open trailer and away we went. Along the way we drove through rain storms so the open touring car got very wet including the Naugahyde upholstery, but it weathered the rain pretty well.

On one tour we were going along at a reasonable pace when a rod in the engine started to make a very unwelcome noise, it sounded like a machine gun in the engine. We stopped and waited for the trouble vehicle which we always had tag along on tours. We got the car back to the motel and talked to others about the problem. Some believed that the rod could be replaced without removing the head if you do it carefully. Care must be used to assure that the rings stay compressed and in their groove. I thought I had nothing to lose. If I had another rod that had the correct dimensions for the crank then with some luck and careful work, I might get it done. Those going on these tours were very resourceful and realized that they were driving old iron and that anything could happen, so they tended to be prepared for problems the best they could. By chance another person had a rod that would work with a shim or two.

It was a rainy afternoon but it was time to tackle the problem. It was a tight fit under the car to remove the pan but it had to be done carefully to avoid destroying the pan gasket. Then the bad rod was located, it was missing a lot of babbitt and the piston was pulled down just far enough to get to the wrist pin. If the rings came out of their groove, then it was game over and time to load the car for the trip home. Fortunately the rings stayed in their grooves and a new rod was attached. A shim may have been required but it was fabricated from a beer can. The rod bolts were torqued and the pan and gasket were attached. The engine was started and it sounded good, no unacceptable noise. We participated in the remaining tours and successfully made it home. The rod stayed in the engine for a couple of years and was finally given back to the original owner. During the rod replacement it was raining and a very good friend, Pat McGowen, an excellent mechanic, diverted the water around me when I was laying under the car, thanks Pat! As always you were very useful and helpful – you diverted the water with precision.

Happy motoring,

Bob Hughes 6-3-2022