

Motor Trend tests an all-time great that is still going strong after more than 30 years, worth many times original price

by Gene Creighton

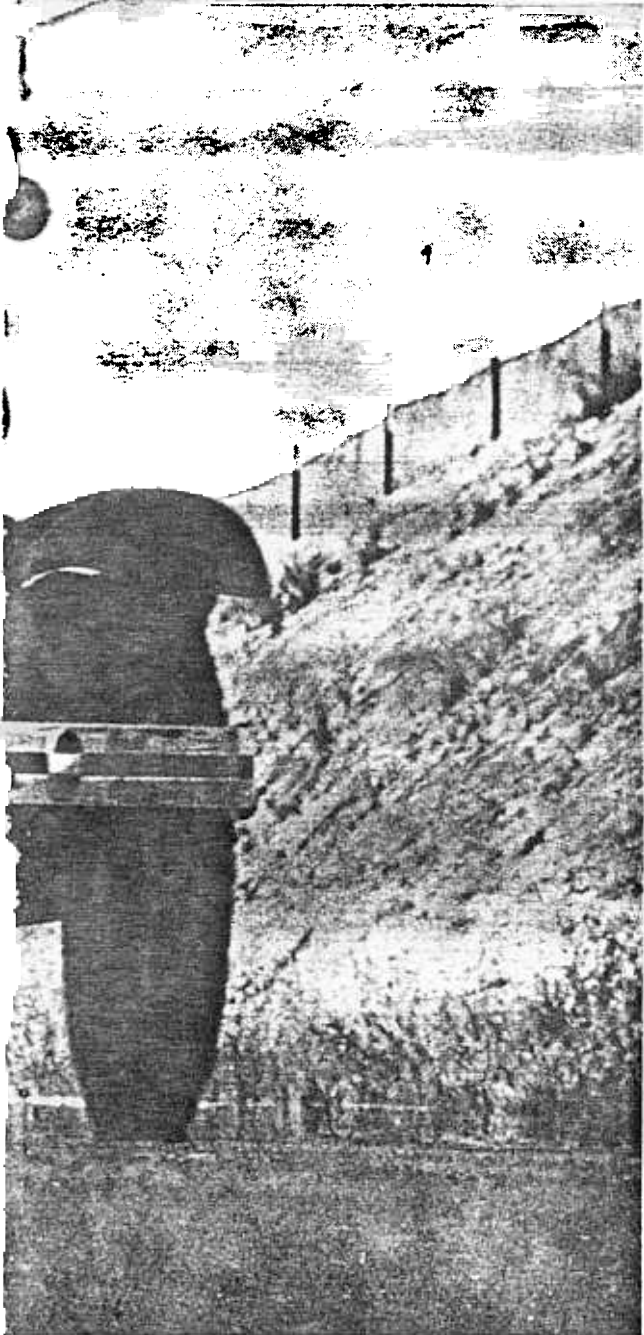
WHEN HENRY FORD created the Model A in 1927 to replace the Model T, he felt he was offering the public only an "interim" car. The River Rouge genius wanted to give his customers a bigger, more comfortable car, with a gear shift, and a softer ride, and the engineers just about let it go at that. Ford was content, meanwhile, to watch the automotive winds blow, before shaping up plans for a bigger, and faster car in the future.

What followed was one of the success stories of the age. The Model A was not only successful to the tune of more than 4,000,000 from 1928 through 1931 (there were even 10,000 or so built in 1932 from parts), but it established longevity and value records which make it the most-often restored "antique" available today.

The Model A was a huge success, embarrassingly, even ap-
pallingly so, to Ford Motor Company. The public liked its low price, which got down to \$260 for a standard coupe, and ranged about \$500 only for such luxury models as a Sport Phaeton, Town Car and Victoria. Most of all, they liked the do-it-yourself simplicity, which meant that almost anyone with a handful of tools could keep his "A-bone" perking.

Most of all, however, the public liked the A's ruggedness — its ability to take abuse and hard work without breaking down. A-owners were delighted to find that where other cars rusted out, the A's thick steel body panel, screwed over hardwood frames, showed no such problems. The four-banger engine, with its 200.5-cubic-inch capacity, its one-bolt carburetor, and its ridiculously low four-to-one compression, proved it could spin up 100,000 miles, or 200,000 miles, with minor attention to valves and bearings. Never a bear for performance, averaging only 21 mpg under optimum driving conditions, the Model A won its spurs on sheer reliability.

The 50,000 or more Model A restorers in the country today frequently tell the story of how Henry Ford visited Sweden in



Model A Ford

continued

the late 20's and was impressed with a piece of Swedish steel which he saw at an industrial fair. As the tale goes, Ford immediately incorporated the steel into Model A production. Actually, except for a small amount of imported steel used in springs, all of the tough metal which went into the Model A was produced in Ford's own plants, to a high enough standard, but never intended to last the 33 years which it has today. Model A's, in 26 different models, simply represented a happy mating of tough, excellent design in engine, transmission, differential, body and running gear.

What Henry never knew was that in 1962, half a million of his clacking Model A's would still be in operation, 50,000 of them restored to like-new perfection, and that almost any Model A today is worth at least twice what it was when it rolled off the Detroit production lines in 1927 to 1932. The average roadster today, restored to mint condition, calls for \$2000; a standard coach, \$1500 or so; and such rare models as the A-400 convertible sedan, the Town Car, may tip the scale at \$2500 to \$3000 — anywhere from five to eight times their original cost!

The A-bone has become much more sought after than the familiar Model T Flivver, with Model A Ford clubs in every state, two huge national organizations, pushing both interest and the price up to a national-interest phenomenon. Never remotely identified as a "classic" but definitely a special-interest car because of its ruggedness and the spunky prettiness of a gleamingly restored model, the A owes its perpetual success to

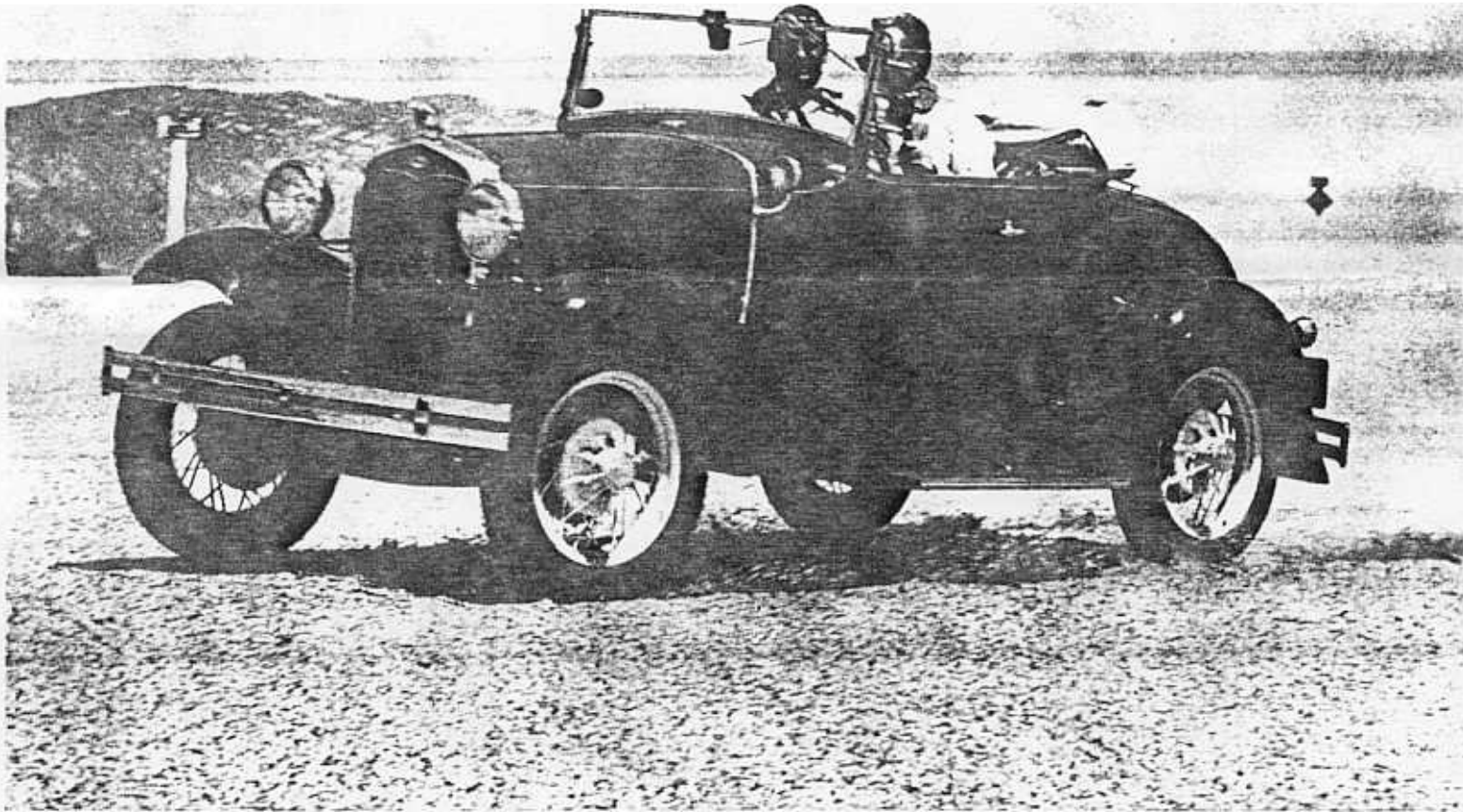
the fact that it is an everyday-use car, capable of meeting most demands which a motorist can put on it. At the same time it is metamorphosing from a jalopy into the restored class.

Unlike the big, graceful, expensive behemoths of the 1930-1935 Classic Age, the Model A can and is driven every day by most owners, without fear that a sideswipe will bankrupt the exchequer. It's also the only top-favorite car for restoration which can be encountered daily in such mundane operations as delivering RFD mail, hauling ashes, or for senior-citizen original owners who "wouldn't trade the old tin for anything else."

These are the people who growl adamantly that the Model A is the best car Ford ever built, and ask plaintively, "Why doesn't Ford bring the Model A back again?" Their numbers are legion — until the complainant is pinned down with the direct question, "Would you buy a Model A at what it would cost to produce it today?" Usually, that changes things.

While it undoubtedly would fill the need for city transportation (off the freeways), few people would invest in a car with a top speed in the neighborhood of 55 mph, averaging only 18 mpg or so in city driving, riding on stiff transverse springs, and too slow on acceleration to beat even venerable Nashes away from the stoplight. With its 3 7/8-inch pistons, the Model A's cubic-inch displacement is more than some of today's six-cylinder, smoothly operating engines, and offers far less in economy.

True, a modern-day re-creation of the Model A would bring 100 per cent dependability for cold-weather starting, but its mechanical brakes, and light weight on 4.75 x 19 or 21-inch tires would confront the driver with skid problems on the hairy side. Then, the family accustomed to today's svelte car heaters would find it difficult to put up with the Model A's "manifold heater," which was merely a tube down the exhaust manifold



A 13.1-TO-1 STEERING RATIO MAKES FOR UNCOMFORTABLY FAST TURNS AND WINDOWSILL-GRABBING EXCITEMENT IN FAST OPERATIONS.

Model A Ford

continued

delivering hot engine air, with all of the grease and fumes, directly into the passenger compartment. No, a present-day Model A, with the possible exception of the roadster, would find few cash-on-the-barrelhead buyers.

Fifth-wheel performance tests run at Riverside Raceway, California, bear out the above. The car in this instance was a cherry-maroon roadster, owned by John Wedberg, young Los Angeles stock broker, and in as near-new condition as five years of patient construction from new parts could make it.

With two aboard, the 1931 roadster, with a recommended engine red line of 2785 rpm, was put to acceleration tests. Pickup from zero to 30 mph registered 8.4 seconds in one test, 7.9 on the second, a zephyr-like headwind probably accounting for the difference. Acceleration from zero to 45 mph was 19.5 seconds in the first instance, 18.7 in the second. The normal 0-to-60 check proved simply impossible, inasmuch as the top speed which the \$3700 Model A could show was 58 mph.

From a standing start, the roadster ran one-quarter mile in 27.9 seconds, at 52-53 mph. Speed in gears, at 3000 rpm, were

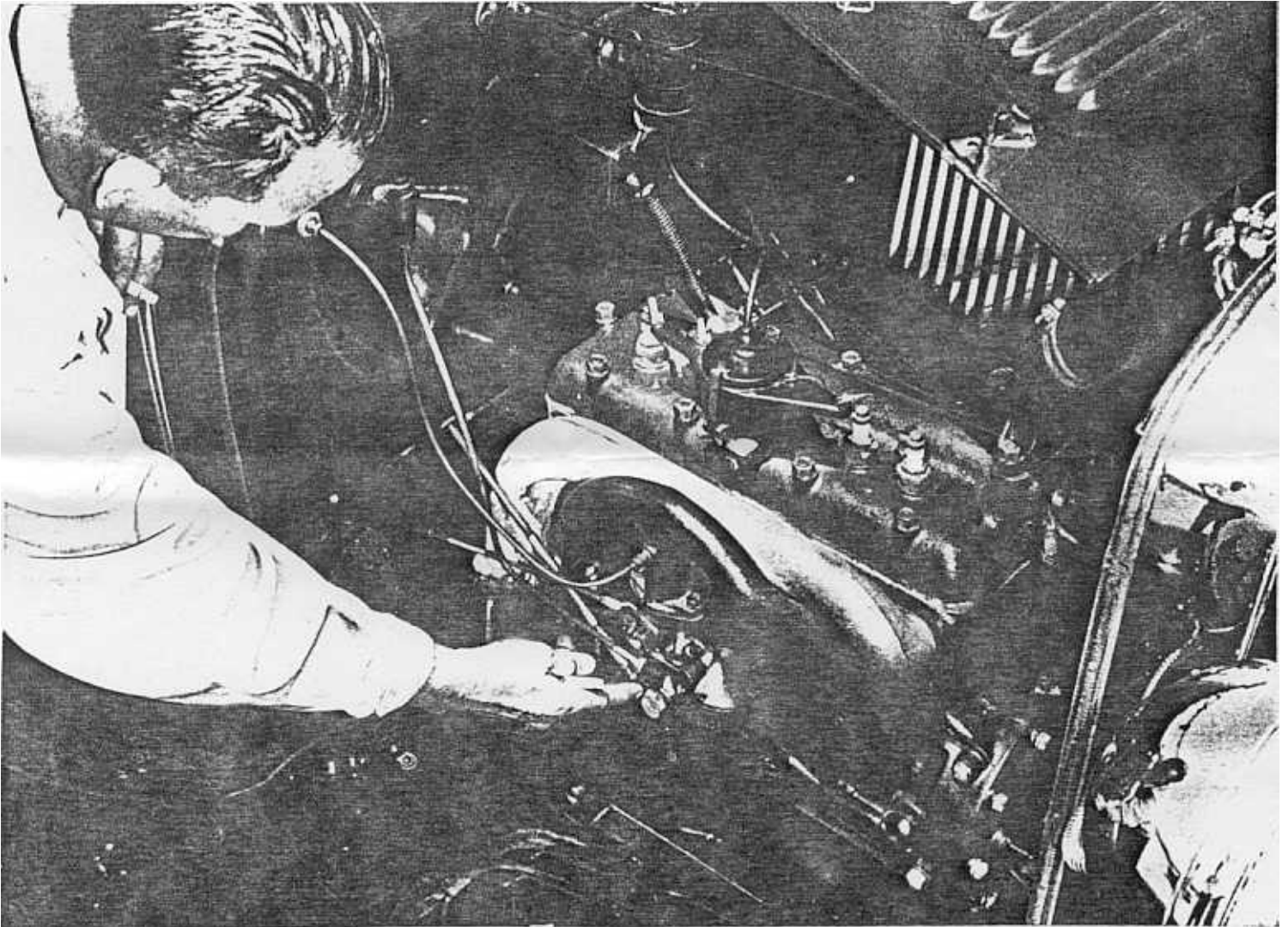
21 mph in first, 32 in second, and 58 in third. Speedometer error, a factor seldom considered in a mass-production economy car such as the Model A's initial design, showed a true reading at 30, 43 at an indicated 45, 48 at an indicated 50, and 58 at an indicated 60. Miles per hour at 1000 rpm in top gear registered a true 20.

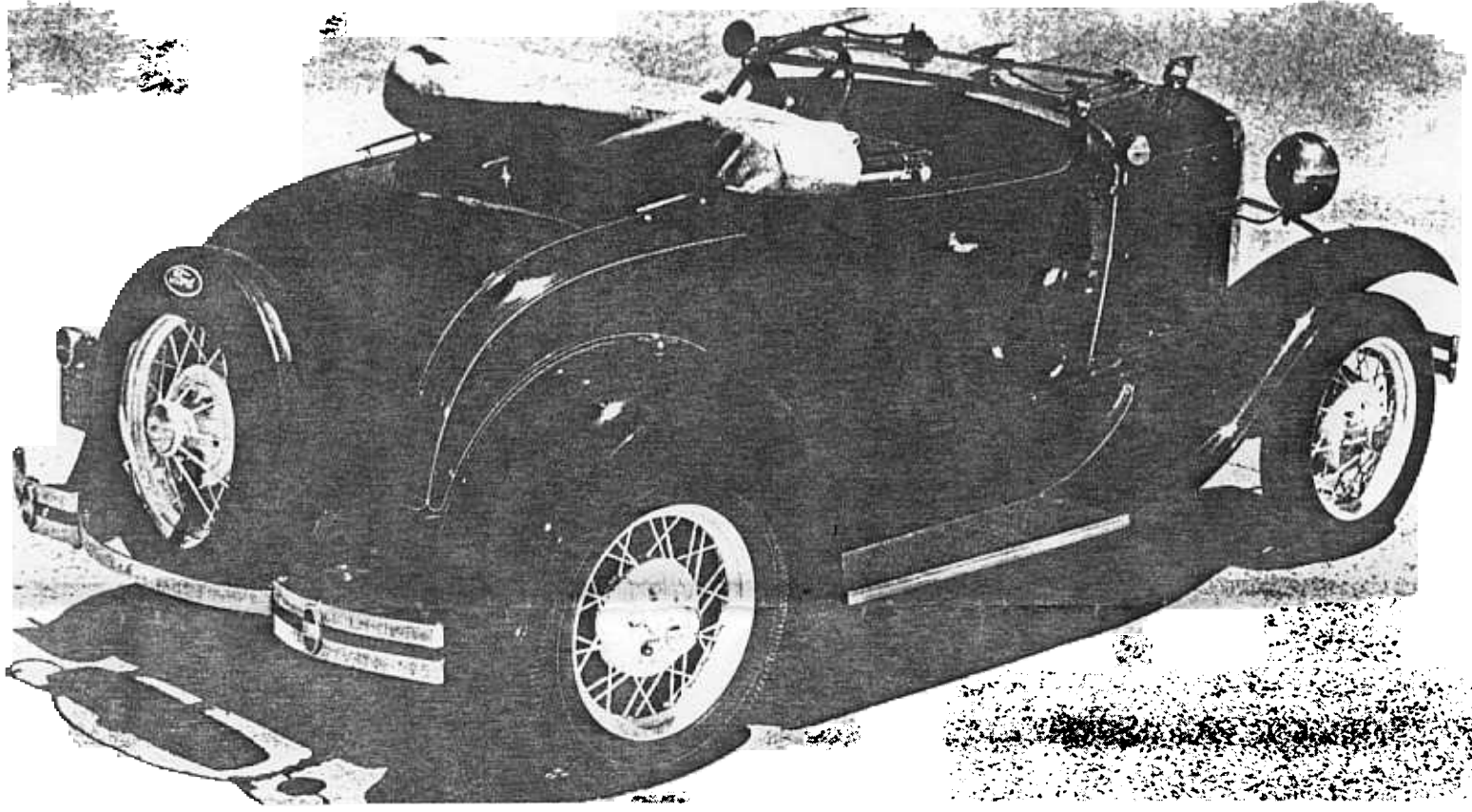
Model A brakes, stubbornly produced in mechanical versions only (although a half a dozen manufacturers had already switched to hydraulics), show unimpressive figures. Stopping distances from 30 mph were 33 feet, and from 58 mph (60 on the speedometer), 206 feet.

Indicative of the characteristics which would probably make a purchaser of a resurrected Model A think twice, was a strong tendency to oversteer, with the relatively short ratio of 2½ turns from lock-to-lock, a tendency to veer easily in high winds which only the Volkswagen of today can match, and a high noise level which would make ordinary conversation next to impossible.

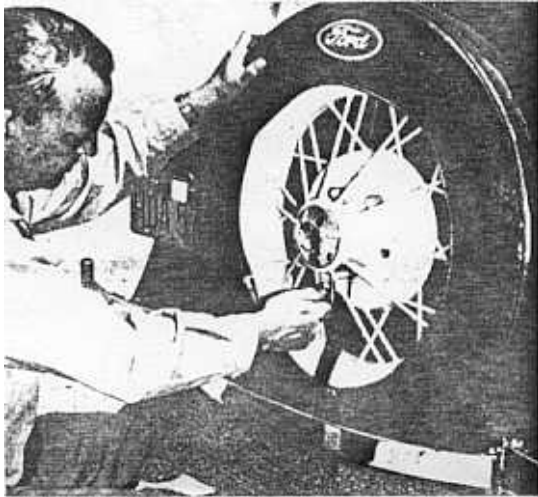
Thus, the story of the Model A is one of a happy coincidence in circumstance in that every element of the little four-banger apparently held the same life expectancy as Emerson's famous one-horse shay. Built simply to capitalize on the record of the 17,000,000 Model T's which had preceded it, the Model A was never promoted as anything but an extension of Ford reliability into a more comfortable car. /MT

200.5-CUBIC-INCH FOUR-BANGER WITH FOUR-TO-ONE COMPRESSION RATIO HAS ONE-BOLT CARBURETOR, AND GREAT SERVICE ACCESSIBILITY.

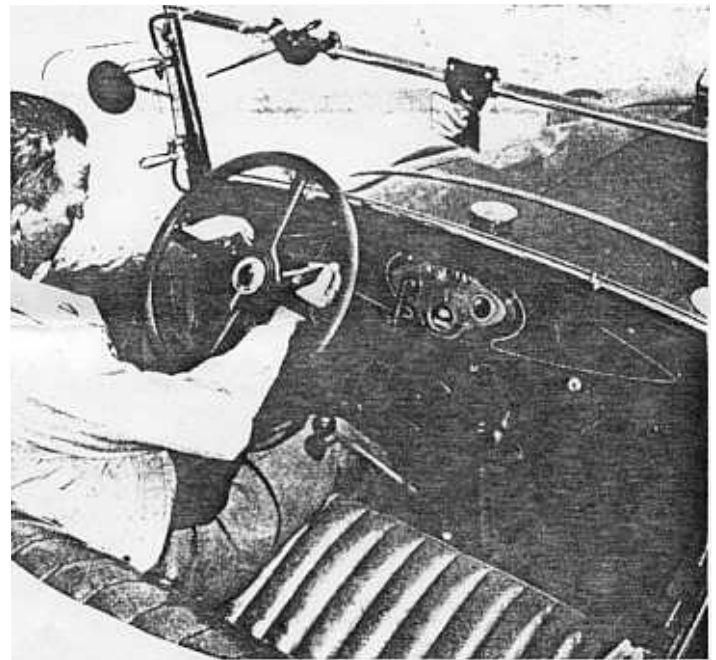




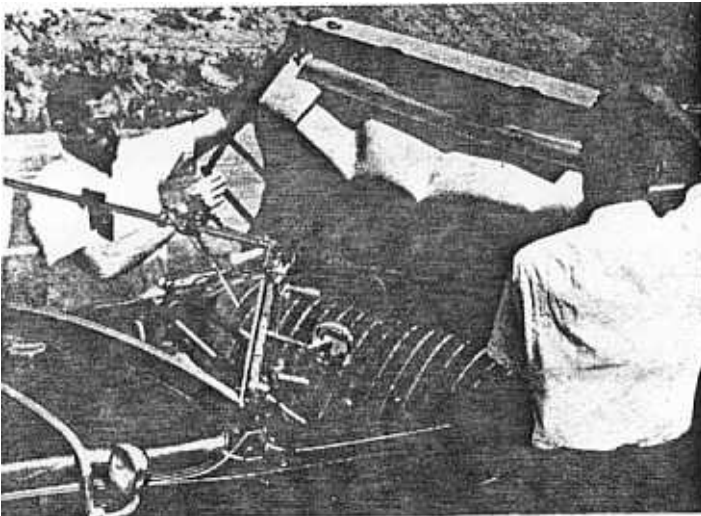
Test car was a cherry maroon 1931 deluxe roadster owned by John Wedberg of Los Angeles. It was restored at cost of \$3700.



No one will argue over the practicality of spare location. Tubes can be patched by pulling tire only part way off rim.

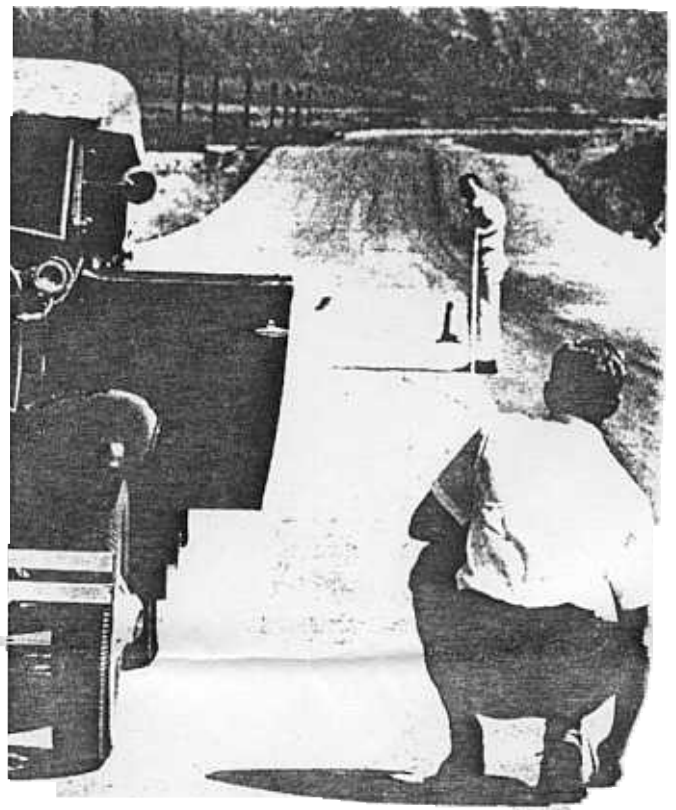
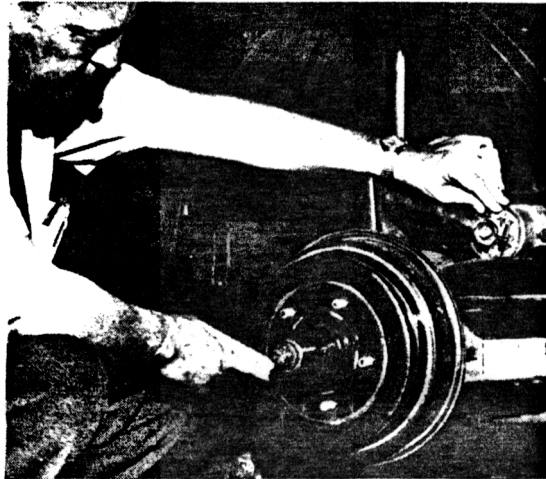


Occupants sit over 14 inches above floor level. Emergency brake, actuating own set of shoes, is pulled for panic stops.



Simple manual top is typical of efficient and durable components that have given the "A" such a long and successful life.

Mechanical brakes of the Model A don't give very impressive results. During panic stops side slew was pronounced, evidence that few mechanics could keep the mechanical brake cams precisely synchronized. Heavy brake drums dissipated heat rapidly and there was little fade.



1931 FORD MODEL A

2-passenger roadster

BASIC PRICE: \$475
PRICE AS TESTED: \$3700
RECOMMENDED ENGINE RED LINE: 2785 rpm

PERFORMANCE

ACCELERATION (2 aboard)			
0-30 mph.....	7.9	secs.	
0-45 mph.....	18.7		
0-60 mph.....	30.1		
Standing start 1/4-mile 27.9 secs. and 52 mph			
Speeds in gears @ 3000 rpm			
1st.....	21	mph	
2nd.....	32		
			3rd..... 58
Speedometer Error on Test Car			
Car's speedometer reading	30	45	50 60
Weston electric speedometer	30	43	48 58
Observed miles per hour per 1000 rpm in top gear 20 mph			
Stopping Distances — from 30 mph, 33 ft; from 60 mph, 206 ft.			

SPECIFICATIONS FROM MANUFACTURER

Engine	Flathead 4 Bore: 3.875 ins. Stroke: 4.25 ins. Displacement: 200.5 cubic inches Compression ratio: 4.0:1	Suspension	Front: Solid axle, with single transverse spring and wishbone Rear: Solid axle, with single transverse spring
Gearbox	3-speed manual, non-synchro; floor-mounted shift lever	Wheels and Tires	Welded wire wheels 4.75 x 19 tires
Driveshaft	Torque-tube; single U-joint	Brakes	Mechanical
Differential	Ring and pinion Standard ratio: 3.77:1	Body and Frame	Double-rail U-shaped side rails; separate body of steel over steel and wooden framework Wheelbase: 103.5 ins.