

# Ford Model A - 1928 - 1932

By BILL VANCE

Henry Ford considered his beloved Model T to be the perfect car for the masses, and he wasn't about to stop making it even when sales began flagging in the 1920s. Although others offered more luxury and style, autocratic old Henry kept the Model T.

But by 1926 Model T sales were down by more than a quarter-million, and many were sitting unsold in dealers' lots. Even with changes like wire wheels and balloon tires, it finally became apparent to Henry that foot-shifted transmissions, weak two-wheel brakes and heavy steering were falling behind the competition.

In May of 1927, after 19 years and more than 15 million Model Ts, the car that pioneered the moving automobile assembly line in 1913, and the Ford \$5 day in 1914, was finally going out of production.

Henry was so dedicated to the Model T that there had been little preparation for its replacement. It seemed as if he really didn't want to face the demise of his revered "Tin Lizzie." The result was that when the Ford assembly lines stopped building Ts, some 60,000 workers were idled. Ford dealers, without new cars for almost nine months, had to survive on parts and service.

According to Charles Sorensen, Ford's production chief, Ford family strife slowed the T's replacement. In his book, "My Forty Years With Ford", Sorensen related that development of the new car was delayed by differences between Edsel Ford, Henry's son and titular president of the company, and Henry, who actually controlled the company.

Edsel, an imaginative, sensitive and for-

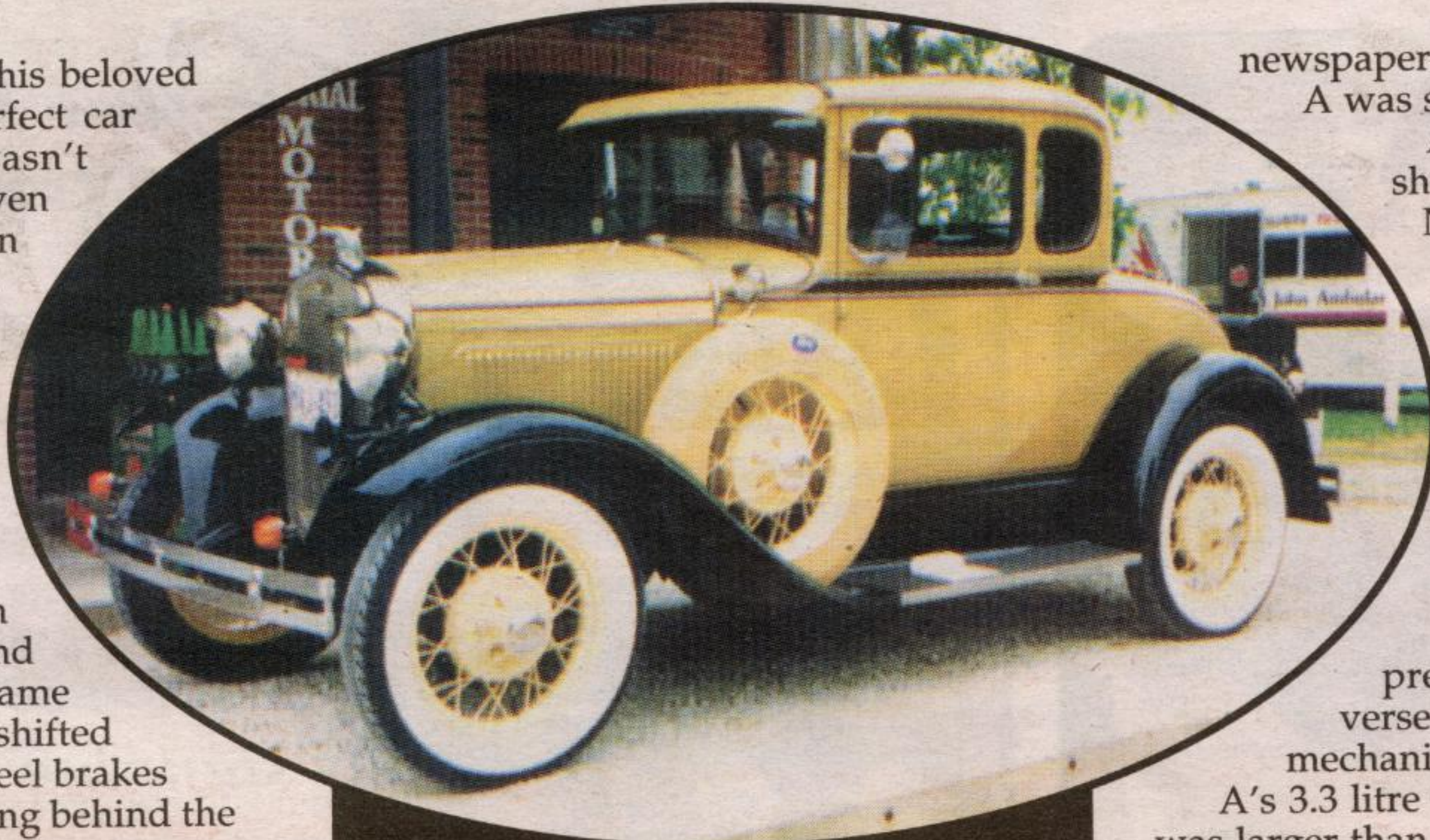


PHOTO BY BILL VANCE  
1931 Ford A Deluxe 5-Window CPE

ward-thinking man, wanted a modern, well appointed car to compete with GM's Chevrolet. But Henry preferred, for example, the planetary transmission; he didn't believe the sliding gear ("crunch gear," he called it) gearbox would stand up.

When a compromise was finally reached, work on the new model proceeded quickly. In *Forty Years*, Sorensen said: "Actually, when Mr. Ford finally decided to replace Model T, clearing the design and getting Model A into production took only 90 days. But it was six months before Henry Ford would go to work."

With Henry Ford's fabled reputation, the new Ford was eagerly awaited. Henry revelled in the publicity and surrounded his new car with a tight cloak of secrecy. Finally, in late November 1927, Ford ran a series of five daily advertisements in thousands of

newspapers. On the fifth day the Model A was shown.

At the car's first public showing in January, 1928 in New York's Madison Square Garden, police had to hold back the surging throng. Fifty thousand New Yorkers paid deposits on new Fords. The mob scenes were repeated in other major cities. It was apparent that Ford had produced another winner.

Edsel's ideas had finally prevailed. Apart from transverse leaf springs, there was little mechanical carryover from the T. The A's 3.3 litre (200.5 cu in.) side-valve four was larger than the T's 2.9 litre (176.7 cu in.) engine, and at 40 horsepower, twice as powerful.

It had four-wheel mechanical brakes instead of the T's two-wheel; a three-speed sliding-gear transmission rather than a foot-operated two-speed planetary; a foot-operated accelerator pedal instead of a lever under the steering wheel; a proper steering gearbox rather than a planetary gearset in the steering wheel hub; and conventional battery and coil ignition in place of the flywheel-mounted magneto. It even had lighted instruments.

The Model A was not only mechanically superior to the T, it was much more stylish. It bore some resemblance to the Lincoln and came in a wide variety of models.

Performance was also significantly better. While the Model T could barely achieve 72 km/h (45 mph), the Model A could sail well past 96 km/h (60 mph). In a simulated road test of a 1930 Model A in February 1957, Road & Track magazine estimated a top speed of 100 km/h (62 mph). The 1928s and '29s were said to be even faster due to larger wheels and a higher axle ratio.

The Model A was also quite spirited. R & T placed its zero to 96 km/h (60 mph) time at 29.0 seconds, as quick as a 1957 Volkswagen. The A's ability to reach 73 km/h (45 mph) in second gear gave it, as *Automotive Industries* magazine commented, "stoplight getaway (that) would embarrass the owners (and manufacturers) of even our highest-priced vehicles."

Production figures for the Model A were 633,594 in 1928, 1,507,132 in 1929, 1,155,162 in 1930 and 541,615 in 1931. The severe drop in 1931, the A's last year, was largely a result of the Great Depression. There was also strong competition from the six cylinder Chevrolet, and the Plymouth with its hydraulic brakes, and in 1931, "Floating Power" rubber engine mounts. Rumours of Ford's own fabulous V-8 engine for 1932 were also a factor.

Although built for only four years, the Model A Ford was a popular car, a transitional step between Ford's ancient Model T and its groundbreaking low priced V-8. It is a very popular collectible today.

# drive

CLASSIC

## Head

Al Kiernan re

Truly, today's cars are filled with whistles galore and do just about everything except the dinner dishes. ABS, GPS, fuel injection systems and computerized just about everything, they are models of speed and fuel efficiency.

Travelling at 55 miles per hour getting a whole ten miles to the gallon Kiernan's

1930 Seagate Blue Nash may not win any awards for fuel efficiency or speed it is a part of an era that is slowly and gracefully moving into the twilight realm of history.

It is an era that has not only captured Kiernan's heart and likely his pocketbook but it has also provided him a neat niche in the automotive business as a builder of fuel pumps originally given to him from 1927 through to the 1970's.

"I started this so that I would have something to do when I retired," says Kiernan who acknowledges that business is going quite well.

When they were looking for a business, says Kiernan, he and his wife Wendy knew that it would have to be something that they both enjoyed. Luckily, the pump business fits the bill.

Wendy works at it full time, handles the administrative side and as the business is predominately mail order, all the typing as well. She also does some hands-on work, cleaning the fuel pumps after Kiernan takes them apart.

"I couldn't do this without her," says Kiernan.

There are not, he says, many people providing this type of service, in fact Wendy Enterprises is the only one of its kind in Canada now rebuilding and shipping fuel pumps all over Canada, the United States and even as far away as Australia.

Along with fuel pumps for classic engines, they also re-work fuel pumps for marine and agricultural type engines.

"We can rebuild any fuel pump," says Kiernan, and he has the parts to prove it.

The tidy shop, tucked away in an industrial unit, is full of parts that have been garnered from a variety of sources over the last ten years, including flea markets and old shops that have gone out of business.

Pulling a box off a shelf, Kiernan points to a date of 1953 and the item

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