

What is today's 'Canadiana'? Milton's Bill Gregg says 'CMPs'

By Jim Robinson

When the collectors of today are asked to describe "Canadiana" the majority will invariably point to the furniture made in Upper and Lower Canada made during the 1830's and 1840's.

Fashioned from the highest quality materials, crafted to be utilitarian and efficient in design first, it is simplicity of line combined with a meant-to-be-used construction which makes Canadian furniture of the period stand out as not only unique but perhaps an historic high point of how furniture should be made.

So when the collector 100 years from now is asked to describe "Canadiana" what will he or she single out as best fitting the criteria of the preceding paragraph.

The answer will probably be trucks of the 1930's and 1940's.
Not just any truck like a pickup or a van, but a "CMP", Canadian Military Pattern, a form of fighting vehicles used during the Second World War by almost all the Allies in all theatres of war.

Prized for being made of the highest quality materials, crafted to get the job done and definitely meant-to-be-used, Canadian Military Pattern trucks along with the ubiquitous "jeep" did more to win the war than all the tanks and half-tracks combined.

And is there a fineness of line?
There is the saying "beauty is as beauty does" and what first appear to be tortured shapes of armor plate and boiler plate on chassis, take on a lasting impression after a visit to the private museum of Dr. Bill Gregg of Milton, who collects military vehicles of the Second World War and publishes as part of the five-member Canadian Military Historical Society.

It is only after a tour of the large structure housing the vehicles, that the boldness of the shapes, the uncompromising construction, and the ingenious details of design come back to mind.

It is sadly a trait of the Canadian to dispose of things which are good.

True Canadiana furniture is almost impossible to find. What remains accrues equity faster than gold.

Canada produced a staggering 850,000 CMPs for the war effort, and only a few hundred remain, most rusting in fields, stripped of everything but the shell.

While it is possible to construct "new" antique furniture, it will never be possible to construct another CMP or the rarer birds of Canada's wartime vehicle period such as the Staghound or Sexton.

Let's take a look inside the 1942 Mercury Bill Gregg has on display at his museum in the guise of a staff officer's car.

Open the hood and there is an engine, a oil-bath carburetor, a radiator, generator, and that is about it. No endless miles of tubing and wiring, no air, no power this and that.

Beauty is as beauty does and in the case of the Mercury it is simplicity itself to fix and keep run-

ning and it still gets you 25 miles to the gallon, something Detroit still can't do with most of its "small" cars.

What started as a project to keep himself busy, has resulted in Bill Gregg publishing three books and delving into one of the great Canadian stories of neglect and uncaring in our history.

Many now may not think it is a tragedy to have let all our trucks and vehicles fall into disuse and decay; but then how many people in 1880 thought they were making a mistake when they threw out the furniture their father had made in 1840?

In 1973, Dr. Bill Gregg, a veterinarian, left Connaught Laboratories to be his own boss.

In so doing, Dr. Gregg starting looking around his farm for something to do in his spare time in order to get away from a hectic business life.

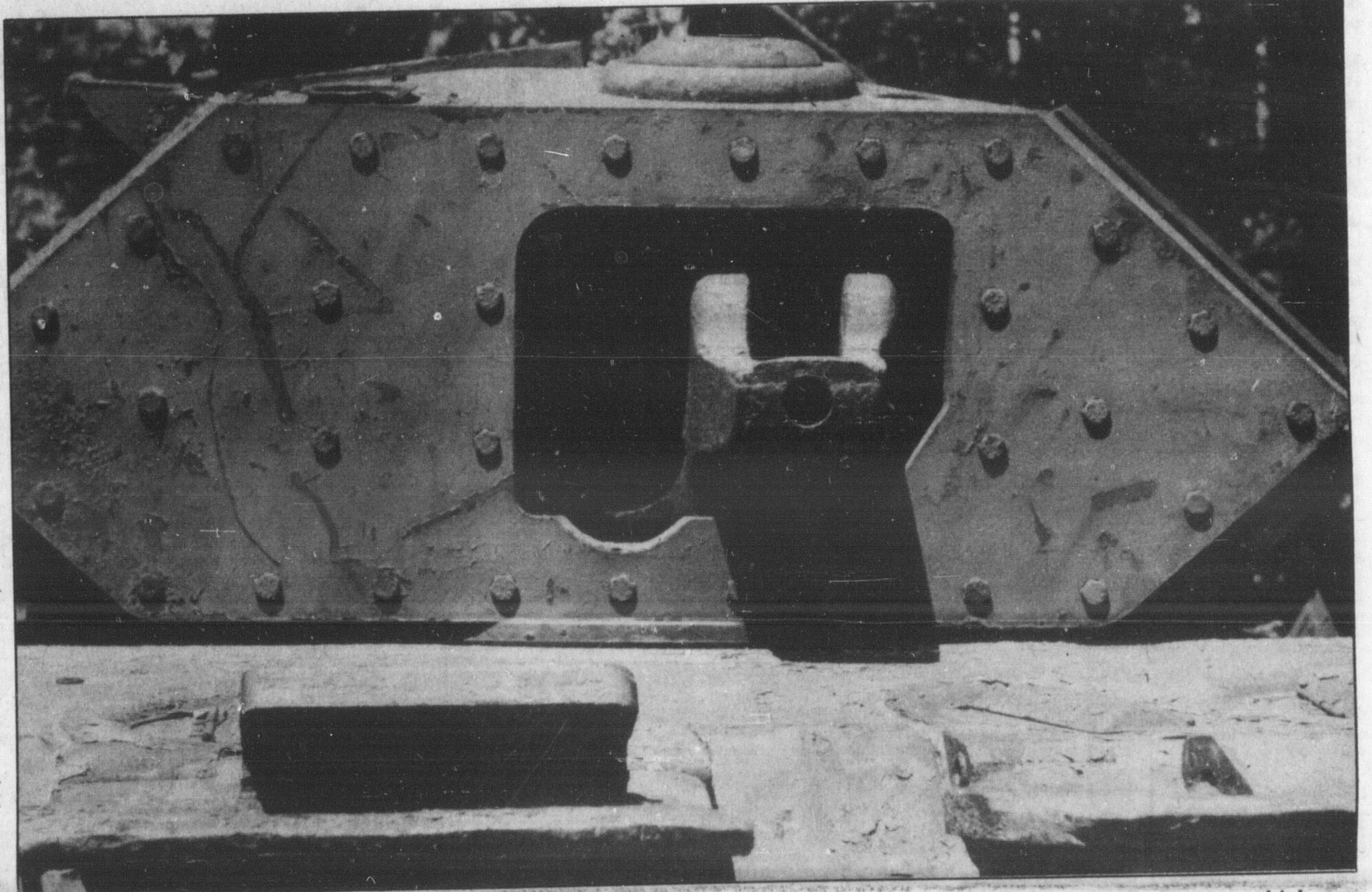
Dr. Gregg had collected the odd antique car including a pristine 1915 Model T Ford he says he still wishes he had today.

In his travels around Ontario with Connaught Labs, Dr. Gregg had noticed the huge four-ton, six-wheel drive trucks of the war period sitting in scrap heaps or abandoned behind barns.

There is no easy way to explain what someone starts collecting, but for Dr. Gregg it was a regular old army truck.

Being a researcher by training, he started looking up the records or where the truck was built, who built it, and why it was built in the first place.

And that opened the doors to what Dr. Gregg feels is one of the great untold stories of Canadian history and the central theme of his new book, "Blueprint for Victory", which will be in print by August and is



Silent steel visage. This Cruiser-style tank turret sits atop a very rare Staghound all-purpose armored car. Although it looks massive it was not proof against German anti-tank shells. It

was Canada which developed a new type of armor which was eventually adopted by all our Allies.

designed as a primer on Canadian vehicles construction practices during the war.

"I was shocked at the scope of what Canada had done during the war," Dr. Gregg stated, noting Canada not only produced those 850,000 CMPs but fathered the whole line of Sherman tanks built in the United States, and developed the armor plating eventually adopted by all the allies.

And what makes this stranger is no one, no government, no ally ever officially thanked Canada for what it did, and in many cases, played down Canada's role to aggrandize their own.

A case in point Dr. Gregg can document is the Valentine tank. Designed by the British to win the war in North Africa, the tank was a flop. Thin-skinned and notoriously unreliable, the British knew being assigned to a Valentine crew was like being ordered to commit suicide.

A copy was sent to Canada and we were ordered to reproduce it, despite the fact the British knew it was a bad design. But in 1942 anything was better than nothing.

And so the Valentine came to Canada and there was just the hope it could either be foisted off on this country or perhaps it could be improved to provide some form of home service.

The Valentine was definitely improved with the use of cast armor pioneered here by Dofasco. Another improvement was the inclusion of a General Motors bus engine.

By this time even the British distrusted the Valentine and they would not except the 1,200 built in Oshawa because their own "better British" models were death traps.

So the 1,200 were sent under lend-lease to the hapless Russians.

Although the British never could bring themselves to recognize the fact, the armor was strong and the GM engine started and ran when the British engine never would.

"In fact the Russians considered it one of the best infantry support tanks in their arsenal," said Dr. Gregg.

"Not bad for us colonials."
While Canada had built some excellent specialized trucks in the mid-20's like the FWD Corp and Gotredson designs, our Defence Department tended to contract out for its vehicles, tending not to wholly trust our own people to design and build a competitive unit.

By 1939 with war approaching, the British approached Canada and encouraged builders like GM and Ford to manufacture vehicles. Although there was encouragement, there were no orders, they too not really trusting us to get the job done right.

It is a story too long and involved to reprint here, but Canada evolved the CMP which eventually was to make up more than 80 per cent of all trucks used by the Commonwealth.

The excellence of these trucks eventually forced the British to have them built and/or reassembled in England but Canadians were wholly in control of this work.

But even while this was done, Canada was getting a short shrift once again.

While all the CMPs were in fact Canadian, the plants producing them would result in 60 of every 100 being considered "British" and the other 40 being considered "Canadian".

The CMPs were so good that they were scooped up in Europe when they were left behind at the end of the war. Some are still in use today by Czechoslovakia and they may still be used in Denmark.

Perhaps the finest vehicle made by Canada was the General Motors armored truck. A semi-

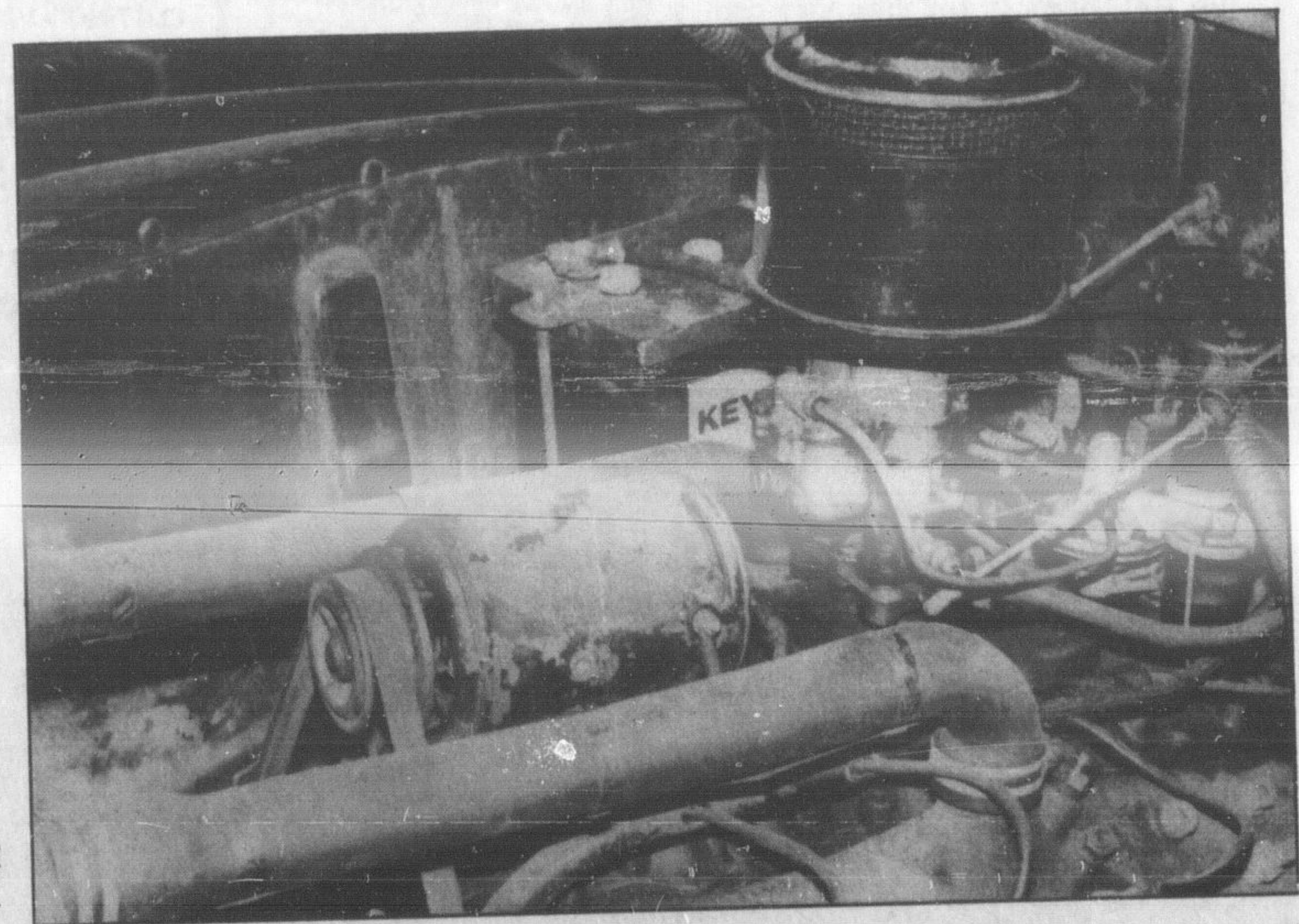
Continued on Page D3



Better than new condition. Dr. Bill Gregg stands amidst some of the vehicles he has amassed in this collection. The author of three books on Canada's contribution to World War Two, Dr. Gregg has perhaps the best collection of these specialized trucks and armored cars in Canada.



Started a wartime trend. The Second World War saw the emergence of the self-propelled gun which was produced in Canada and the United States but saw its greatest use with the Germans and Russians. This is the Canada-designed Sexton which set a pattern for Commonwealth SPs during hostilities.



How simple it is. As opposed to today's car engines swamped with hoses and wires, this is the engine of a 1942 Mercury staff car. It is simplicity itself and still gets about 25 miles to the gallon.