

NESTLER 1930 MODEL A COUPE AKA, PRAIRIE CHICKEN by RICH NESTLER

Starting out as a much needed prairie mode of transportation of a farm family in central Kansas in 1930, and surviving the severe winters, blistering summers and forging through the dust bowl years, this Model A survives today in a condition nearly as good as the day she rolled off the assembly line.



Purchased as a basic Coupe by Chester Waudby, husband of my mom's sister Bertha, in Russell, Kansas, she was the modern means of transportation between the family farm, owned by the Waudby family, and the residence where Chet and Bertha lived above the downtown

Russell Waudby pool hall operated by Chet and his brother in addition to their farming activities. There was also a beauty salon upstairs, oh yes, Chet was also a hair dresser! My now car did belong to a 1930's farmer, pool-hall operator and hairdresser and it wasn't the car that got the attention.

My first real memories of this vehicle are of it parked unattended for many years under a rusting fire escape and leaning, smelly Sumac tree at a back upstairs exit from the Waudby pool hall/hairdressing residence. This would have been the early 1950's, and the condition was of a car littered with dead leaf debris, a gaping hole through the roof where a brick had been tossed, flat-rotting tires, and a BB shot windshield.



My parents and I had moved some 70 miles from Russell to Lyons, KS in 1953 when I turned 10, and it was shortly thereafter that my dad Otto purchased the A from Chet FOR \$50 and somehow got her to Lyons. My dad was a "tinkerer" and he and friends got her operational and back on the road. There were limited attempts at making her pretty such as metallic silver paint for the rims and bumpers, new Sears and Roebuck fabric for the roof liner and blankets on the seat, but the objective was purely to have her run. And she did run and as I recall there was the replacement of the original engine with one from an old Baldwin combine from the Waudby farm. It was while we were living in Lyons that my dad purchased a swivel-wheel trailer that we attached to the A and utilized for hauling yard waste to the local dump.

Note the inserted photo above of yours truly standing by such in 1955 at the age of 12.

Three years later in 1958, we moved 10 miles south to Sterling, KS where I attended Junior High and High School and where this vehicle truly became mine. I learned to drive in this car. It was on Rattlesnake Road just Southwest of Sterling that I remember my first driving lesson with dad and us ending up in a not so deep ditch as part of the process. Sometime later, at the age of 15, no license in hand, I also remember being followed home by a white police car, Chief of Police Newby behind the wheel, inquiring as to where I thought I was going. Sterling is a town of approximately 2000 and in the 1950's, quite permissive, but it did result in a conference with my parents and restricted use until the license appeared. Over the ensuing three years it was my High School car allowing me to go home for lunch, a four mile round trip, that included giving like-minded lunch friends an opportunity to ride on the running boards to where they chose to exit...one named Pat I remember exited sooner than planned, but lived to tell the tale. The car was an on again, off again school shop project involving Bondo and welding attempts on multiple dented and cracked fenders, the replacement of the fabric roof, and something about the wheels for which I don't choose to remember the exact details in that the front drivers side wheel was "lost" upon crossing a rail road track on one journey home for lunch.

Yes the car was used to haul yard waste and yes it was used for learning to drive, and yes as victim of high school shop projects, but oh the fun and memories.

This second inserted photo is of me and Gary, one of my best friends, in 1959 proudly holding our .22's following an afternoon of chasing jack rabbits through pastures.

On another occasion, my friend Bud and I were pheasant hunting, not by walking the fields, but rather by chasing them over pasture and wheat fields. After getting stuck in one particular farmer's field and being extricated by him and his tractor, we headed home only to have Bud discharge his 12 gauge through the passenger side floorboard. I still hold him accountable for my loss of hearing and the replacement of the bell housing that made a strange clanking sound all the way home. This also led to another school shop project! And then there were the pranks of additional high school friends one of which involved the picking up of my A, and setting her down at a 90 degree position within a narrow alleyway next to a downtown venue one Saturday evening.



My A remained my mode of transportation throughout the last two years of high school and some of my early college before graduation in 1965. At some point before graduation, she ended up back at home being driven sparingly by my dad. Following graduation and serving four years in the USAF, I ended up in California and then Oregon with a "real" job. It was probably 1975 when my parents towed her out to Oregon with the thought that I and my young family would be able to enjoy her presence. There was some use with a local friend who owned a '29 pickup and we shared some mechanical skills and took several outings, but mostly life took over and she sat outdoors for the next six years, under-utilized and then I and family moved from Salem, OR to Bellevue, WA in 1981. Again, with a new move, growing job responsibilities, varied interests, a home needing attention and four children to raise, the A sat in the garage unattended. About 1998, some two years before our youngest daughter was due to graduate from high school, she asked if I would take her and her unknown date-to-be to the senior prom in the Model A. "Well of course honey." Life remained in the way and literally nothing was being done on the A and every so often I would hear about the promise and the upcoming graduation that was years away, then months away, then weeks away. So about three weeks out I get serious and try to get her running to no avail. There was some sign of hope but I had an irresolvable timing issue. Somehow I reached a crusty fellow that was primarily a logger who said he could make a Model A engine run but was too busy for more work. After hearing my sad and true circumstance, he said he would call me back and let me know. The call came, he said he called his other commitment and told them to "stand down" because he had an emergency job that took priority. He showed up in a lowered flat bed, modified tow truck painted bright yellow with stacks and backed into our driveway. Once under the hood of my A, he began taking things apart. I asked if I could watch and learn from what he was doing. His reply was "NO, I work in the woods because I don't like people being around me." Some time passes, he gets her running, having replaced a bent upper shaft in the distributor, collects his money and off he goes never to be heard from again. Some two weeks later I drive daughter and date to their senior prom in an unlicensed, unsafe Model A Ford that joins a line of luxury limos and Hummers and is the hit of the occasion. Score!

That was the year 2000. The A sat in the garage again until one fateful day two days after Thanksgiving 2012 when a friend with two young granddaughters came to visit. This friend drove up from Oregon driving her daughter's car with which she was unfamiliar. After climbing the steep hill to our home and turning sharply into our driveway, she inadvertently stepped full down on the gas instead of the brake. This action brought the 2010 Highlander screaming through our closed garage door behind the Model A, striking it and caving in the back end while forcing the front end into solid wooden drawers positioned against the interior house wall resulting in the front end also receiving much damage. She and the two granddaughters were all pale-faced as I and family members came running from the house into the garage to see what had happened. They were not injured but certainly in shock. Insurance actually totaled their Highlander. Once we learned all were OK, and we celebrated a late Thanksgiving with them as that was the reason they came, reality sat in and I needed to make decisions about the future of my A.

Filled with questions, I called my insurance company but they didn't know of local places that might do a repair/restoration or even whether it was worth repair. They would start by finding an adjustor that would have knowledge of a Model A. In the meantime, what did I want to do with the car? This is when the light went on that I needed to search for local knowledgeable people dealing with Model A's. Google sent me to Evergreen A's and some potential phone numbers. Not sure to whom I spoke but he recommended a fellow that did restoration and also knew something about valuations that might be helpful in dealing with insurance. We had the A towed to that location where time and money was spent coming up with a diagnosis. A few days later my wife Jan and I went back and were informed as to the car's condition. The prognosis was DOA. After all the years of sitting outside and rusting and rotting, and the years of sitting unattended in our garage, and following the just described collision, this was a vehicle that "needed to be put down". We were told that if we really want a Model A, take the insurance money and buy one in operating condition. There may be some salvageable parts, with an offer to purchase being made, but to throw good money after bad would be foolish. We were heartbroken and returned home to consider our options. The advice we received was undoubtedly true as she was a wreck in all regards. But she was our car and we have long history together and that matters.

Shortly thereafter I received an inquiry call from an Evergreen member and after listening to my story about all the history associated with this particular Model A, mentioned a possible option for restoration. My A was towed to this second location, I joined MAFCA, and Evergreen A's, and over the next 15 months I was able to assist with her being put back together and on the road. It needs to be told that following body restoration and before painting, the question arose as to color choice as she had always been all black. The new primary color chosen was Kewanee green. Didn't know anything about the color other than we liked it. Following the painting, I researched the color just out of curiosity and learned it's a Potawatomi Indian word meaning Prairie Chicken. That alone is good enough for the car's name, but there's more. Wife Jan is 1/8 Indian, and yes, Potawatomi! We had no idea of any connection at the time of color choice. Think it was meant to be?

During and following this primary restoration, many Evergreen members have been involved with the refurbishing/rebuild process in numerous locations with many hours of labor and instruction. The results of which now include new forever friends, the joy of club gatherings for tours and miscellaneous outings and the ability to assist others with getting their A's on the road for fun adventures. We will forever be thankful to the many involved members of the Evergreen A's for their friendships and contributions in getting Prairie Chicken out and about.

Submitted:

Rich and Jan Nestler
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