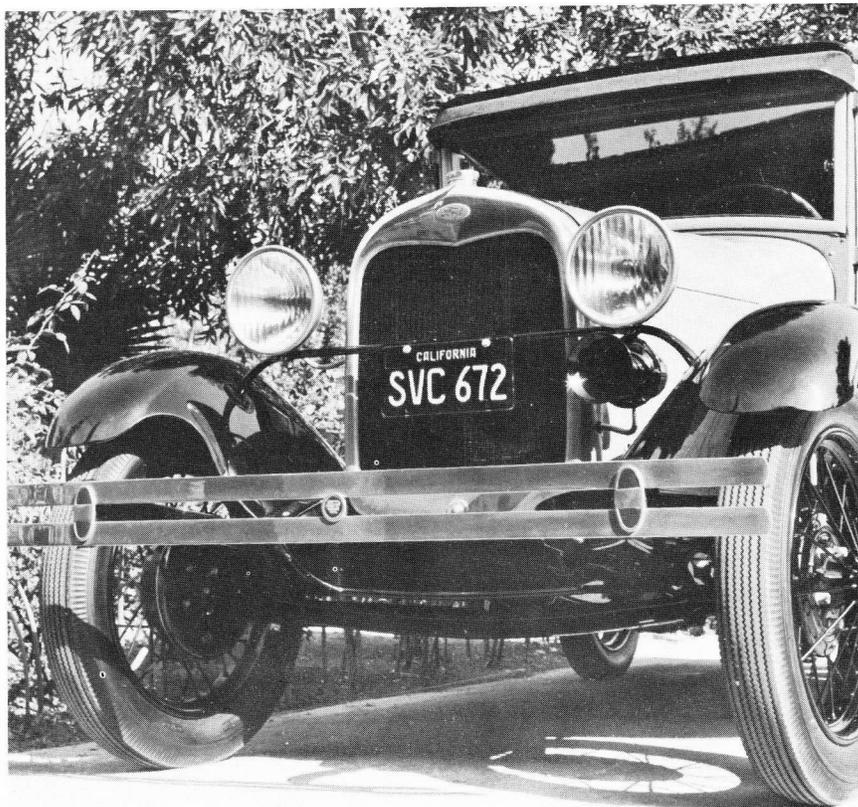


The Early Birds

By H. S. "DOC" KALINKA

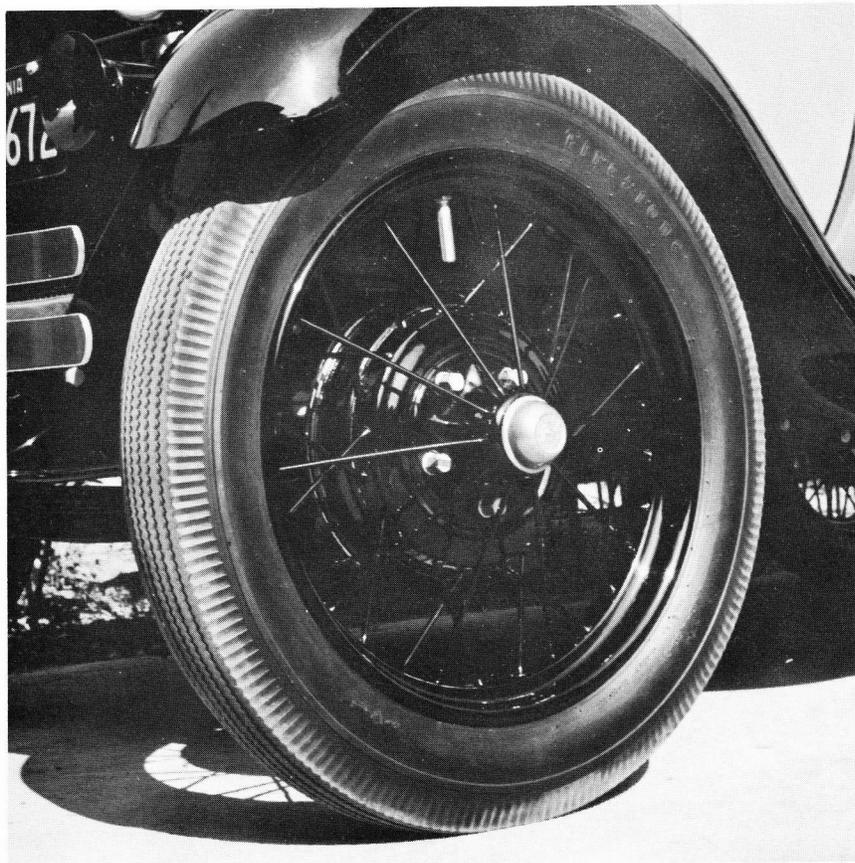
Forty years ago the first of our beloved Model A Fords were produced. Records relate that nearly five thousand complete 1928 Model A Ford cars were actually built in 1927. From pictures and present day articles on these "early birds" we find that many errors and false ideas have been created concerning Henry's first. It is not my intention to create more argument and confusion but to simply set forth some of our findings, as compiled from the 1928-Owner Questionnaire which has been sent out to interested owners over the past two years.

The basic intention of the questionnaire was to tabulate, if and when possible, the appearance and disappearance of certain features related to the 1928 Model A. Definite emphasis was placed on the early left-hand emergency brake models. More than two hundred questionnaires were sent out; with a fifty percent recovery.



HUB CAP and WHEEL LUGS same as Model T.

BUMPER with flat, rounded, open end, without the usual bolt, is one of the more obvious features of a true "early bird." Also notice round center bumper clamp with Ford script and "made in USA" — same as Model T.



The first misconception I would like to bring up concerns the position of the emergency brake handle. Contrary to some beliefs, the left side emergency brake handle and single brake system is found to appear into the month of June 1928. The changeover took place between the 10th and 22nd of June that year and involved engine numbers A-155,000 thru A-177,486. This data does not apply to commercial vehicles or 1928 passenger cars produced outside the continental United States.

Next, it seems appropriate to discuss some of the ramifications appearing on some of the 1927 models that we have records of; some six reports, I have on file.

We suspect that some or perhaps all of the assembly plants used up stocks of late Model T parts where and when they were compatible on

The Early Birds, continued

the first very early Model A's. Despite Ford directives, many of the early Model A's sported Model T center bumper clamps, with "made in USA" in block letters beneath the Ford script.

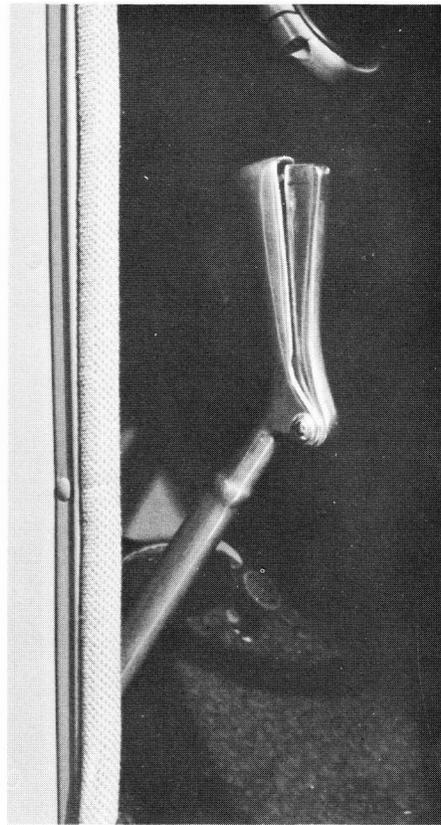
I hesitate to comment on the following, but at least two thousand pairs of open-end front bumpers were released, the vast majority going to foreign assembly plants, especially to Canada.

Many of the sheet metal body components on the early A's were actually bolted and screwed together instead of being spot welded or riveted. Many of the floor panel patterns and rear fender well patterns differed not only from car to car but also from one side of the car to the other.

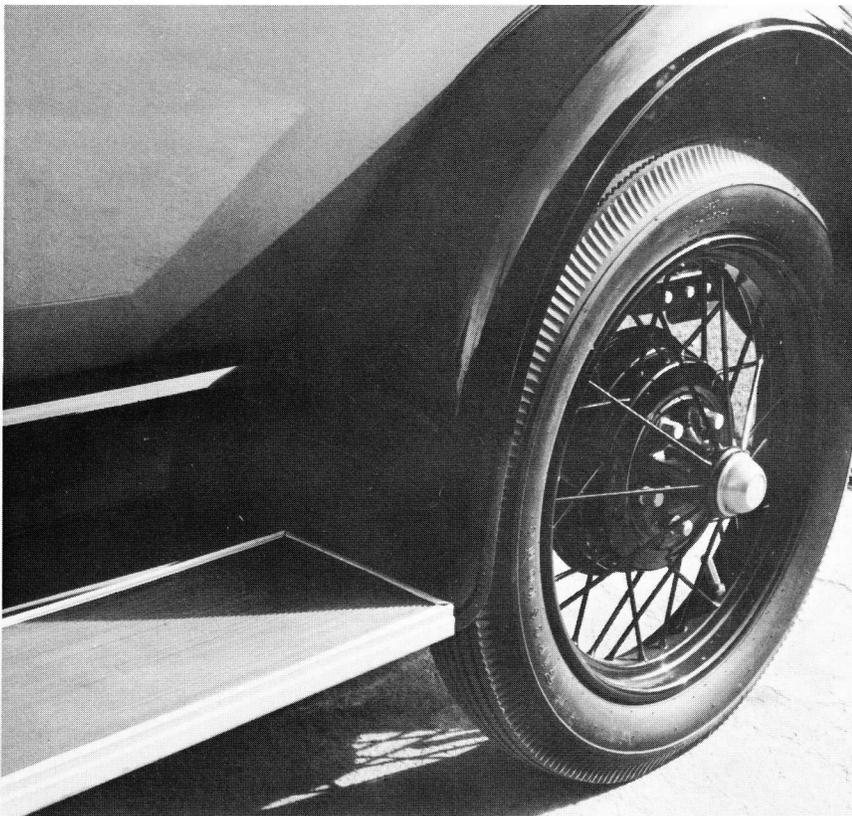
In retrospect, from forty years away, one might summarize that the assembly plant did not receive a full stock of parts to build a complete car at first. Thus necessitating the use of whatever they had on hand or could acquire in order to make it saleable and roadworthy. It cannot be denied that the first days were not difficult and trying, since from mid October to December 31, 1927, only five thousand vehicles were manufactured. Compare this to the near record production rate



REAR BUMPER CLAMPS have Ford script.



EMERGENCY BRAKE HANDLE with pistol grip gooseneck, located at far left, next to door on driver side.



RUNNINGBOARD APRON is smooth and straight along the top. Later car would have slight raise (or "bump") to clear the

emergency brake rod underneath at point just forward of rear fender, about where streak of sun reflection begins.



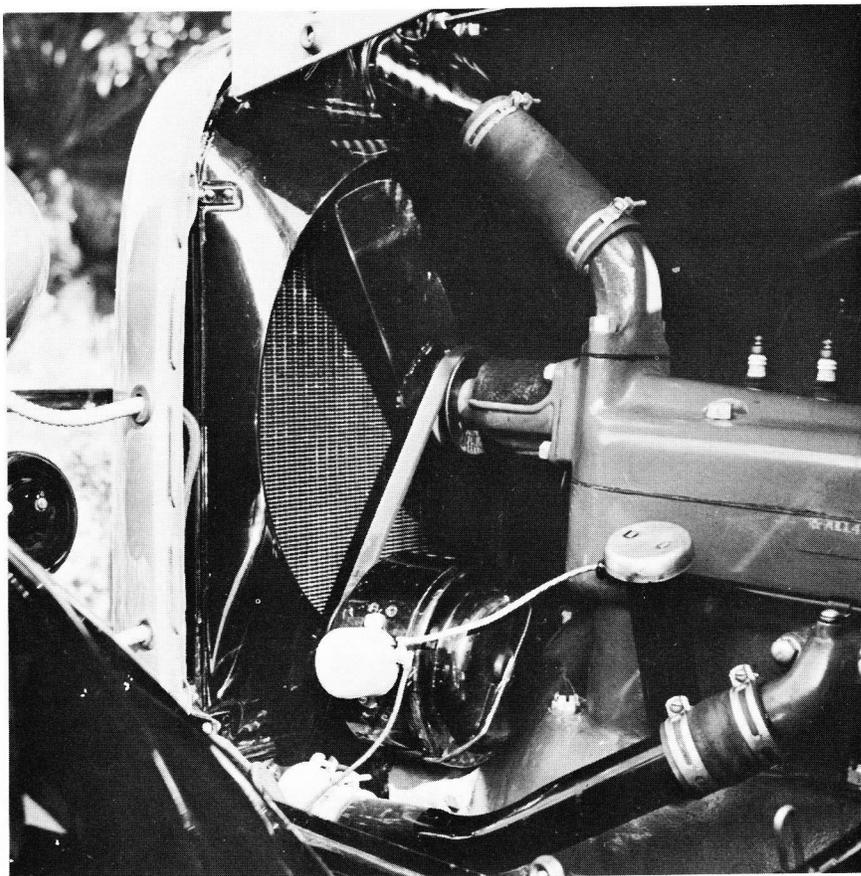
EARLY RADIATOR CAP at left has deeper recess around top than later model at right.

of nine thousand units *per day* in 1929.

After only a little research on the subject, one begins to imagine that the Model A must have been designed while it was being assembled. The number of changes evident on the first early five thousand or even twenty thousand Model A Fords manufactured defies imagination or description. I will describe, however, just a few of the most obvious deviations from what may be considered a "typical" 1928-1929 Ford.

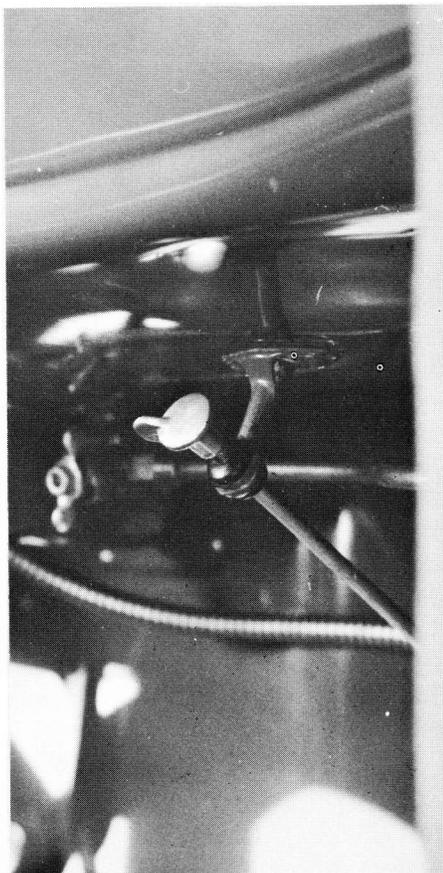
The radiator shell lacing, or webbing, was not riveted onto the shell but was interwoven on the shell (like Model T radiator shells).

Clutch and brake pedals were completely smooth, with no ribbed pattern or raised boss on the ends to prevent your foot from slipping off. Upon casual inspection, one might think that these pedals were worn smooth — like an "A" with the odometer around a couple of

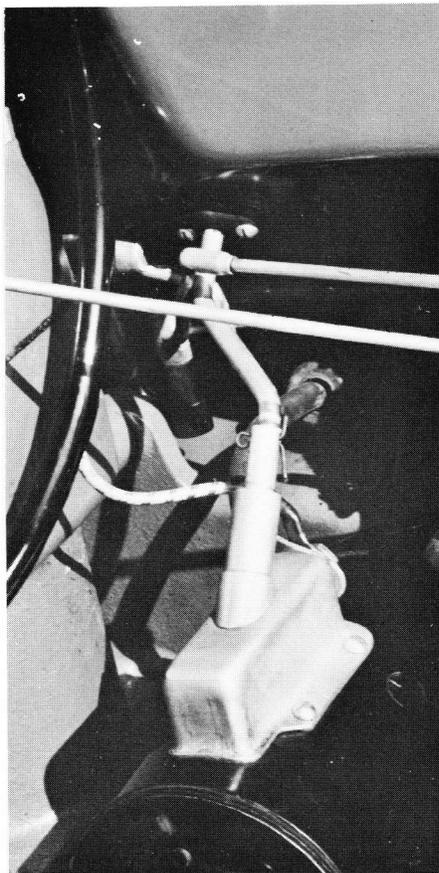


SEVERAL FEATURES of early Model A can be seen in this view: the fan shroud, the hood lacing woven through the radiator shell, the "powerhouse" generator with side-mounted cutout and the metal conduit.

SHORTER CHOKE ROD.



OFFSET STARTER ROD.



times. Actually, these smooth clutch and brake pedals appeared on at least the first 70,000 or 80,000 Model A Fords.

The "powerhouse" generator, which is considered by some as a trademark of the 1928's, actually appeared in three different forms. The very early A's had a cadmium plated adjusting arm which held the generator in position. The cutout was located on the *side* of this powerhouse generator. The most significant difference, however, was the finish of the back or end cover on the generator. The end cover was either unpainted aluminum or metal plated with dull nickel or cadmium, again unpainted.

Another early item was the ignition cable with the long, five-inch solid end; the end which screwed into the distributor. This solid portion was integral with and included

the forged conduit clip ($\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick), through which it is bolted tight to a head bolt. A rectangular Briggs and Stratton patent plate is riveted to the solid end.

Other "early bird" features are the fan shroud, the offset starter rod, metal conduit, short choke rod, a smooth runningboard apron just forward of the rear fender (instead of the bump which clears the emergency brake rod), and a very subtle difference in the contour of the front fenders where they sweep down to the frame, etc.

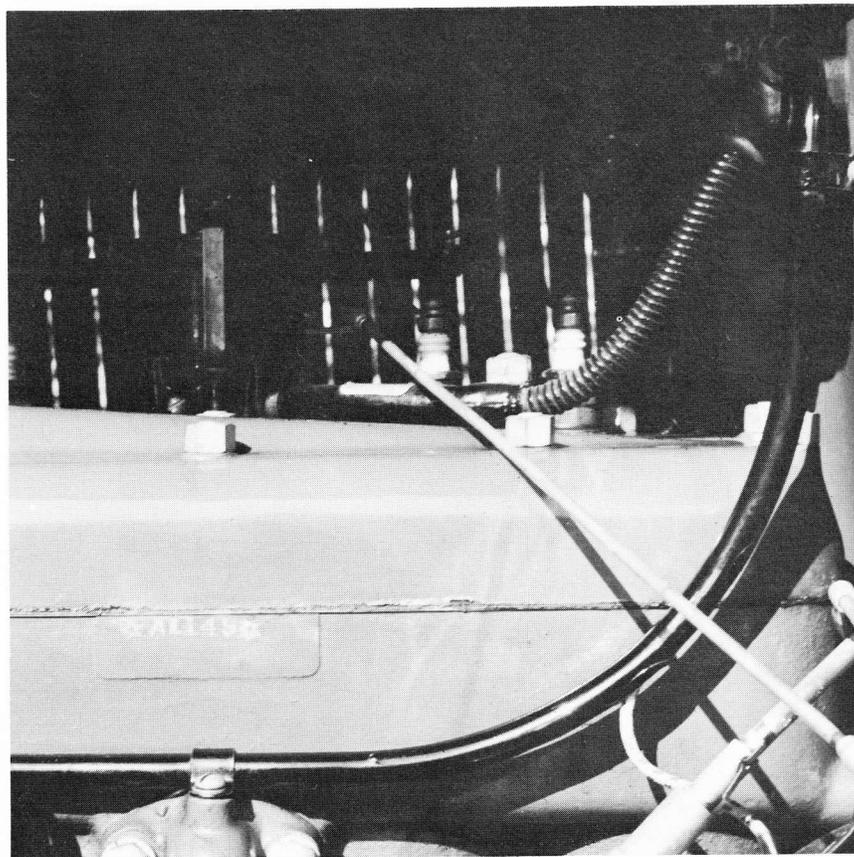
These differences will be found when comparing the early 1928 with a later 1928, or a 1929. But as mentioned before, even the early ones will vary from car to car. Do not expect two cars of similar dates to look alike. We previously discussed one cause for this — the problem of factory changeover and parts shortages — but another factor would

of course be the matter of parts replacement. When a car was returned to the Ford agency for service, or especially for repair, it would be modified with the latest part then being issued by the factory service department. Naturally, after thirty or forty years of wear and accumulated grime, that replacement part is going to look just as legitimate and original as all the other parts on the car.

One of the earliest cars in our questionnaire file is a Tudor belonging to Andy Baudino of Tustin, California. The engine number is A-1149. It has almost all of the "early bird" features described here and was used as the model to illustrate this article. Incidentally, it is beautifully restored; a first place trophy winner at the Albuquerque National Meet and a recent "Award Winner" in *The Restorer*. [Vol. 11-6, page 5.]

The earliest early bird in our file is another beautifully restored trophy winner, and also from California; a Phaeton belonging to Joe Crum of Oceanside.

NUMBER A-1149 on engine block of the Baudino Tudor dates it within the first few days of December 1927.



The Earliest

By JOE CRUM

Our early-bird Phaeton was sold new in the Oklahoma City area in December 1927. The buyer was a Mr. Martin. We bought the car, still in Oklahoma, in 1959. Between that time it had a very interesting but very rugged life.

The correspondence I received while tracing the car's history to find its origin was perhaps as interesting as the car itself.

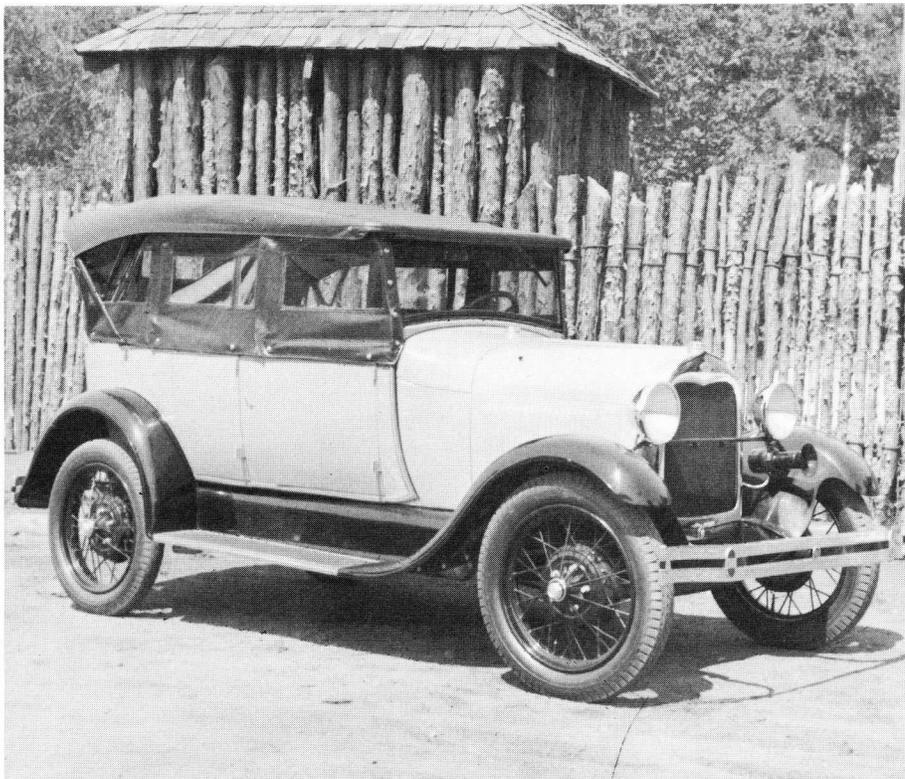
After finally locating Mr. Martin he explained how the original engine was changed in order to get the "new" type connecting rods, and eliminate the X-beam rods. Which answered the question of why the engine number, A-102758, was so much bigger than the frame number, 746. The first engine number was 797, we learned.

No number was ever found on the firewall or anywhere else, even after a chemical wash. We almost missed seeing the frame number, it was so faint.

After Mr. Martin sold the car it was used on a farm near McAlister, Oklahoma, until it was purchased by my brother, Harry Crum, in 1958. At that time it was still licensed and still in running condition, as it had always been, and was being used as a pickup to haul loads around the farm. Considering the kind of use it served, I cannot understand why the body was never cut, as so many of them were under such circumstances. But instead, the wood etc. was just loaded on the rear seat and floor boards. Even the top bows were left on, folded down out of the way and secured with, you guessed it, baling wire.

The car was so rough, in such bad shape, that I would not have considered it had it not been one of the first ones, and so complete. Everything was there, such as it was.

After I bought it, a friend of mine in Oklahoma loaded it on a car trailer (although it was still in



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Earliest

Early Birds

AS RECORDED BY THE
KALINKA QUESTIONNAIRE

- A-797 PHAETON
Joe Crum—Oceanside, California
- A-1149 TUDOR
Andy Baudino—Tustin, California
- A-1639 PHAETON
Ken Webber—Manhattan, Kansas
- A-3064 COUPE
Bill Strum—Neehan, Wisconsin
- A-3182 TUDOR
Jim Lewis—Modesto, California
- A-4568 ROADSTER
John Buesing—St. Paul, Minnesota
- A-5877 ROADSTER
John Xifos—Granite Springs, New York
- A-5961 TUDOR
Logan Whitehurst—Gilroy, California
- A-7529 TUDOR
Philip Adkins—Monterey, California
- A-10677 TUDOR
John Tremble—San Luis Obispo, Calif.
- A-13727 PHAETON
H. S. Kalinka—Chilton, Wisconsin
- A-18992 TUDOR
Ralph Busby—Merced, California

POSTSCRIPTS:

FORTY YEARS AGO

For more about the early days of Model A, how it was designed, the people involved, etc., see the 5-part series *Development of the Model A* by Art Miller published in 1963, beginning in our May-June issue of that year. (Vol. 8-1, page 4.)

THE EARLY BIRDS

The Kalinka research is still in progress. If there is an early bird roosting in your garage and you would like to help in this interesting and worthwhile project, send for a copy of the 3½-page questionnaire. Send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to H. S. Kalinka DVM, Route 1, Chilton, Wisconsin 53014.

THE EARLIEST

Got an early Model A? One earlier than Joe Crum's Phaeton? If so, we would like to hear about it and so would our readers. Please send information and pictures to the editors, Box 2564, Pomona, California 91766.

running condition) to bring it to Sapulpa, Oklahoma, where I was to pick it up. On the way, the trailer broke loose and turned over, right on busy Highway 51 Bypass in Tulsa. That's like turning over in the middle of the Hollywood Freeway in Los Angeles at five o'clock in the evening—if you can imagine. It made for a lot of confusion, and of course a lot more bumps on the poor old Phaeton.

The restoration was a family project with my wife, Gretchen, and sons, Gary and Daryl, doing their share. Together we put in, by accurate count, exactly 4,016 man-hours on the restoration. Which just goes to prove that amateurs are not nearly as fast as professionals — and perhaps not as good, either. But cheaper.

We did it all ourselves, including the upholstery and even the nickel plating. Fortunately, I have access to the equipment. We were also fortunate to have a complete collection of Service Bulletins, plus a collection of the letters sent out by the Ford Motor Company to dealers from September 1927 to the end of Model A production. These were

very helpful. We also found *The Restorer* to be a great help.

It took a lot of searching to get the right pieces, eventually getting what we needed from fourteen different States, plus Canada. There are no oddball replacement parts on the car. It is completely AR — the fenders, running gear, etc. — everything genuine and original. It was a lot of work, time and trouble, but we are now very pleased with it.

It has apparently pleased a few judges, too, since we have won three national trophies with the car. It has not been out in competition since the San Diego National Meet in 1963, but we plan to take it to the National Meet in 1968.

During the time we were restoring the Phaeton there was no organized research about early Model A's and very little information was available. Now, thanks to the Kalinka questionnaire, and the publicity given to it by *The Restorer*, owners of early A's have a point of reference, a way to compare notes. He, and the club, and the participating car owners, are to be commended for taking some of the guesswork out of early-A restoration.