

Rear-end Rebuild in Reno

By Ron Harper, 1998

With Martin Harding

In 1998, I got the national Hard Luck Award at the Model A Ford Club of America's National Convention in Reno. The following is the story I wrote that won me that trophy out of the hundreds of people who attended the meet from across the nation:

The trip from Corvallis, Oregon to Nevada, the Silver State, was interrupted by a flat tire about 30 miles from home. Flats are quick and easy to fix, especially when four people are helping.

About Klamath Falls, we heard a clunk. A strange new and different clunk. What's one clunk with a Model A? We wanted to get to Reno so one clunk wasn't going to bother me!

About the California border I heard another clunk, or was it the first one revisiting us? Who cares? We are on the road to Reno, in the Silver State.

About at the Nevada border, another clunk was heard but it was heavier and much louder. Hey! We are almost to Reno and are not about to stop. The meet headquarters, the Reno Hilton appeared up ahead. We pulled up to the doorway and started emptying our luggage trailer and parked.

Early the next morning, I left the hotel and went to start the Model A so I could find a place to wash it. When I started to move, talk about a clunk! The whole coupe shook. I dared not go any further so I found a phone and called a buddy in the hotel. He sleepily agreed to come down and listen to the clunk. His expert ear heard it and his vast mechanical skill led him to blurt "you've got a problem!"

I clunk clunked over to the repair tent and pulled the drain plug in the rear-end. I had always heard Nevada was the Silver State but was stunned silver, not just gear oil pour out of the rear end.

Word got around and the group from the Albany Enduring A's Chapter appeared in coveralls, wrenches in hand. We dropped the rear end and separated the differential halves. What looked like silver turned out to be gears. The ring gear had a piece out of it as big as my wife's hand. That piece and many smaller parts of ring gear teeth littered the inside bottom of the banjo housing.

We laid the ring gear out on a barrel where the many passers-by who stopped to give advice could see it. I wrote on a paper towel and put it next to the displayed ger to “Check back. This Model A may be for sale! Donations accepted.” So, people started putting money in the gear as they came by to check our progress. (Many had never seen a Model A rear end totally disassembled). I had earlier taken my credit card to the meet’s parts vendor a short distance away and told him to “keep it, I’ll be back for more parts”. The \$15.75 in small change the observers donated was really appreciated. It helped offset the cost of the new ring and pinion gears, all bearings, seals, gaskets and cotter pins.

After two long days of the grease and grime of taking apart the entire rear end of the car in the hotel parking lot, the third day was almost fun as we put it all back together. And I did get to participate in the car games and the Grand tour in my own car. I may have to rename my car “The Silver Bullet”.

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