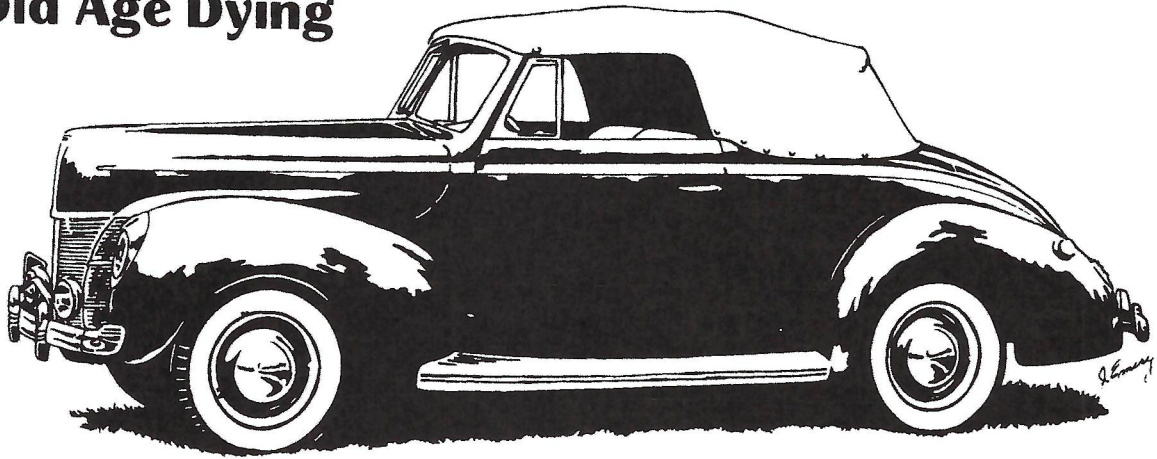


New Age Stirring —Old Age Dying

Fiftieth Party for the Nineteen Forty



The 1940 Model 01A Ford, announced on October 15, 1939, properly begins a new decade. The car itself was really a culmination and the final statement of Model 40 introduced in 1933. Though body weight had risen some 290 pounds over the eight intervening years, the wheelbase was still the same 112 inches. The 1940 60-hp Model 02A was, in fact, but 15 pounds heavier than the 1933 car. The car was 15 inches longer than in 1933, two-thirds of which increase was made in the 1938 model. The tread base was unchanged from 1932 and was even $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch narrower than on the Model A. When the public viewed the new 1940 Ford, they had little trouble recognizing the same compact, high-speed automobile which had been in fact familiar since 1933.

In particular, for 1940 the basic sheet metal was unchanged, the sedans carrying along with the 1938 body, and the coupes a continuation of the 1939 style. The Convertible and Convertible Sedan of 1939 were both discontinued in favor of a new club convertible style which combined the virtues of both bodies. A vacuum-operated power top made the 1940 Convertible seem a more modern automobile than its predecessors.

In styling and mechanical details there was much improvement for 1940. The grille and hood layout was entirely new and was cleverly dimensioned to be virtually interchangeable with the 1939 model, requiring no changes in front fenders. The grille was strengthened by a vertical profile utilizing fine horizontal bars, though it was nicely fussier than in 1939. The Standard grille was a mild reworking of the 1939 DeLuxe style. Ford stylists had not yet come up with a distinguishing grille motif that could be gradually developed in each succeeding model. Ford stylists at the time were simply redesigning the grille treatment each year to give the new car a fresh look and to distinguish it from its predecessors. In this

they were quite successful, for, with the Standard car series aside, there is no mistaking the year of a Ford.

The teardrop taillights used for 1938 and 1939 gave way to a chevron design. Sealed beam headlights were fitted, in concert with the other major manufacturers. The new lights had been demonstrated in February 1938, and were the result of efforts by the Automobile Manufacturers Association to produce a light that would meet varying state requirements.

A concession to the times was the introduction of front door vent windows, the Ford design having the sealing vertical bar attached to as well as rising and falling with the main door glass, except on the Convertible. But as soon as the window support channels deteriorated and became sloppy, the seal was gone between the window vent and the car.

A brand-new instrument panel broke sharply with previous practice. The dash, no longer vertical, was full and rounded, the instruments set in a raised panel in front of the driver. On the DeLuxe cars the instruments were deep-set beneath a tan plastic fascia, while on the Standard cars a single sheet of glass covered all.

Ford abandoned circular speedometers, which had been one of the best features of the instrument layout since 1932. This mistake, if it could be termed such, was corrected in 1942. The 1940 Standard car instrument panel did retain a fully displayed speedometer pointer, much easier to read than the DeLuxe models. The standard panel was continued in the truck lines through 1947.

A welcome change was the abandonment of highly styled panel knobs mounted here and there in favor of uniform round knobs positioned at the base of the panel, a pattern retained for some years.

Smokers received attention in 1940, for it was the first year when two front ashtrays were fitted to the Ford, one at each end of the instrument panel.

The most immediately noticeable mechanical change was the application of Warham's steering column gearshift to the successful blocker-type synchronized transmission of 1939. The new shift was crisp in action.

New for 1940 were redesigned wheels in which the lugs were returned to the same spacing as on the wire wheels—which were abandoned after 1935—but slight hub differences prevented interchangeability. The new wheels ended the complaints about drum distortion and also reduced the transmission of road noise.

Another important change in 1940 was the introduction of an anti-roll bar or ride stabilizer on the front spring of the DeLuxe 85-hp models. Ford's answer was the anti-roll bar, a straightforward method of tying down the front axle at its outer ends to limit roll. It also limited free motion of either end of the axle and in one stroke destroyed the old Ford argument that the transverse spring prevented frame wracking. In this sense, the anti-roll bar was a step away from independent front suspension.

There was increasing concern about roll by all of the chassis engineers. The weakness of the transverse spring in fighting roll rooted in several causes: The spring contact with the frame cross-member was limited to the small central patch. Any attempts to increase roll resistance by broadening that patch drastically increased the deflection rate. The trend was toward ever-lower deflection rates to produce a soft ride. As the springs grew more flexible, roll increased. Car weight was rising, which intensified both problems. The transverse spring was especially weak in combating roll on high center of gravity chassis.

The front spring was now relieved of the necessity of providing roll resistance, and the deflection rate was dropped from 245 to 185 pounds/inch. The new rate was perilously close to the rear spring rate, which would have set up a balanced pitch frequency, and therefore the rears were dropped to 165 pounds/inch. The ride was much improved, and the rolling was certainly checked.

The 1940 Ford was a fine car, tough and strong as Fords had always been, and capable of sustained high speeds. The brakes were good now, and the new gearshift was excellent. Sales were up to 542,755, about 10% gain over 1939, good in the face of the company's disastrous labor troubles in 1940.

It is hard to accept the fact that the 1940 Ford was really a last gasp of the old way and a commercial pause in the success of the company. Its preservation and following among Ford enthusiasts today is a tribute to the tough and sturdy qualities which all Fords have, but easily forgotten is the fact that in its day the 1940 Ford was having a very hard time against the best competition ever. In comfort, room, ride, handling, trim, and to some extent finish, it had surrendered leadership. And what remained was still a wonderful fast pony of a car, able to generate a driver enthusiasm and loyalty—the kind born of speed and acceleration, in which the mechanical forces are readily apparent.

These qualities, however, were not desired by the American public at that time. But we now have come full circle, and have new appreciation for the excitement which was in the Ford car, especially through 1940. Its virtues remain the stubborn extension of one man's intense vision, whom the world was passing by, but who would yet build what he thought was right.



The above came from the files of member Roy Duffield from Wenonah, NJ. He was kind enough to loan it to us, but we don't know and he doesn't remember where it came from or who wrote it. We thought it worthy of your interest because it approaches the mystique of the 1940 Ford from a slightly different angle than we are generally accustomed. So to the author, where ever he is: We thank and salute you and would be glad to give due credit if we just knew who you are.

