

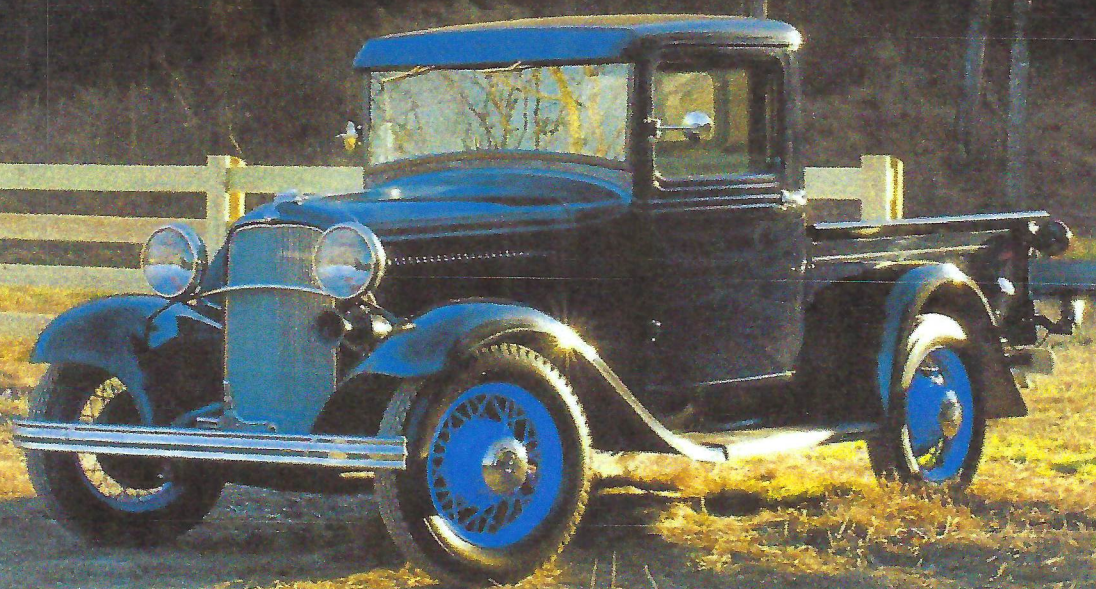
# V8 TIMES

MAGAZINE FOR EARLY FORD ENTHUSIASTS

*An International Organization*

Volume 56, Number 4

July/August 2019



1932 Ford Pickup





*Steve Jordan's 1932 Ford Pickup. - Photo by Chasity Goodner  
Restoration Photos by Gilbert's Welding*

## **When Life Gives You Lemons: The Downs and Ups of the Old Car Hobby**

**By Steve Jordan**

**F**orty years ago, club member Dick Ormiston wrote in the V-8 TIMES, "Sometimes I wonder what drives a perfectly sane person into buying and trying to re-do old Fords. In my case I think it's dumbness, but I'm learning - the hard way". V-8 TIMES, July/August 1978.

I'm like him: it's definitely a dumbness of some sort. I own a 1932 Pickup and, yeah, I have definitely been learning the hard way about old car ownership.

I'd like to tell you about the day I picked up the phone - on the subject of old cars - to hear, "Mr. Jordan, I'd rather take a beating than have to tell you this..." from John Gilbert, the man on the other end of the phone line. He was calling me that day about my truck, which was sitting in his Centerville, Tennessee auto restoration shop, seriously broken down.

But let me back up. I'm not a guy who has liked and worked-on and owned old cars most of my life. My interaction with the hobby began in 2002 when I bought a modern car that, as a vehicle model, had an automotive history that the manufacturer was

touting as a modern selling point. Brand lineage, if you will.

That started me going to Saturday car shows, hoping to see a 1950s example of the modern car I now owned. I never saw one at any local car shows, but I did see some neat old Pickup trucks that reminded me of when I was growing up, and I liked that memory. I had forgotten all about those old workhorse Pickups.

Seeing restored examples, I learned that - surprise - I was "interested" in them! I wouldn't mind having a neat old 50s Pickup I began to think.

Tennessee, where I live, arguably isn't the epicenter of the old car hobby. Do any folks here have old cars? Yes, but not a lot of folks - not in comparison to some other parts of the United States, anyway.

Folks in Tennessee - it seems to me - have mostly street rods, some rat rods, some 60s muscle cars, but beneath that surface, the old car hobby here doesn't seem particularly deep.

I eventually bought and then sold a 1968 Chevrolet Pickup and a 1972 Ford Pickup, but I kept going out to look at old cars. In looking at old cars, I eventually branched out

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*1932 Model B Pickup as purchased -  
"John Deere Green".*

beyond Tennessee, one year going over to the semi-annual Charlotte, North Carolina Auto Fair.

That's where I found my 1932 Ford Pickup. A couple had it for sale in the car corral and it really appealed to me. The couple hadn't owned it a long time, but the husband didn't want to sink any more time and effort into it, so he had it for sale at a reasonable price.

I knew nothing about Deuces. The truck just appealed to me in its accessible simplicity (in contrast, say, to modern Pickups). I took the owner's number and kept the old truck in my mind.

About a year later, I bought the truck. I then kept the truck a year-and-a-half myself under the carport - it wouldn't really run, etc., etc. (That part of the story is just a version of the same "old car story" that has been told a thousand times.)

I am not a car mechanic, nor a hobbyist restorer. For that, Gilbert's Welding and Ma-

chine Shop in Centerville, Tennessee was recommended to me. Mr. Gilbert, who personally likes and also owns old cars/trucks, has an auto restoration business. Centerville is not far from Nashville.

Mr. Gilbert came and got the old truck and once it was at his shop in over a little more than a year-and-a-half's time, he and his men fixed it all up. In doing so, we didn't restore it "like Henry made it". Because I wanted to drive it, we added hydraulic brakes, converted it to 12-volts, added windshield wipers and some additional dash gauges, and a list of things like that.

The truck still had its original Model B four-cylinder engine, which I had professionally rebuilt by James Rogers's business, Dreamwerks over in North Carolina, and which we re-installed.

Eventually it was done, and I got the truck back and started driving and enjoying it, all as I had hoped.

Well, the Ford Motor Company did not set out to build a vehicle that would last 80 years on the road, and the vehicle's engineering, etc. had weak points that time revealed.

Almost all early Ford four-cylinder engines seem vulnerable to developing a drooping exhaust manifold that affects primarily the back cylinder (cylinder number four, nearest the firewall). Mine did too.

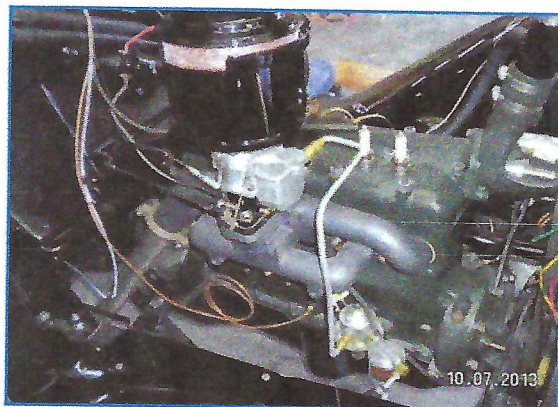
Combine a misaligned exhaust port with a carburetor backfire and what do you get?

Yep, a blown-out exhaust manifold gasket. Mine eventually blew out, but because it wasn't loud, I didn't rush to immediately fix it, and instead kept driving the truck, as I had been, for fun weekend outings.

Well, one day I was out in it, two counties away from Nashville and it began run-



*Original Model B Engine*



*Restored Model B Engine*



ning so rough that I thought I wasn't going to be able to make it home.

What was that about?

I called Mr. Gilbert and he came and picked up the truck and took it to his shop. It was a few days later that I got the phone call that I partially quoted above ("I'd rather take a beating than have to tell you this...").

Mr. Gilbert and his men, in trying to definitively diagnose the truck's troubles, eventually removed the head, making the problem evident: the Model B block was cracked-through in three of the four exhaust valve seats, allowing coolant to run into those cylinders.

Mr. Gilbert hypothesized that where the manifold exhaust gasses were blowing out right against the engine block (meaning where the gasket was compromised) a localized hot spot formed that eventually overheated-from-the-outside that whole upper side-section of the block, which combined with normal four-cylinder engine vibration-at-speed, led the old metal to crack where it was hottest and thinnest – in the exhaust valve seats. I had kept driving it and cast iron eventually did what old cast iron sometimes will... It was my fault maybe, not Henry Ford's... (Ask Model A guys if this type block cracking doesn't sometimes happen...)

What to do now?

In truth, I wanted to quit. A newly rebuilt engine straight down the drain. "This truck can become someone else's to fix going forward", I thought. "I'll sell-it-and-take-my-lumps on the theory of "sunk cost", but I'm not going to just keep interminably spending money on it.

I casually tossed off to Mr. Gilbert that, if anything, I should swap in a flathead V-8.

Well, that's when Mr. Gilbert and his crew really perked up! "Now you're talking!"

As it turned out, Mr. Gilbert had a rebuilt 1953 Mercury flathead in inventory at his shop. Although at one time he had other



plans for the engine he, for whatever reasons, said he would sell it to me and install it in the truck, rather than see me just walk away from my truck after I had worked on it so much to get it in the otherwise fine shape that it was in.

I pondered it all over, still unhappy at the bad luck of it all. While I might be frustrated as much as I cared-to-be, that aside, my truck was still taking up shop space at Mr. Gilbert's place of business, and it couldn't just stay in his shop, on dead-center forever.

I had not been unhappy with the truck's original Model B engine. If I swapped in a 1953 Mercury flathead, I'd just have some way-out, modified vehicle, I figured, like one thousand others, etc.

As frustrated as I was, with time, my resistance softened. My crying wouldn't unspill the milk; a flathead V-8 would add to the vehicle's driveability. A historic Ford engine the flathead era would still power the truck ...hmm...what to do?

I couldn't go back. I either had to go forward or give up on owning the '32. I had zero interest in making the same mistake twice, but I enjoyed old car ownership and really wasn't ready to quit altogether.

I did have an excellent, albeit engineless, vehicle. I also had the undeniable benefit of being a seemingly valued customer of a fully capable restoration shop that seemed to have a plan....Hmm....

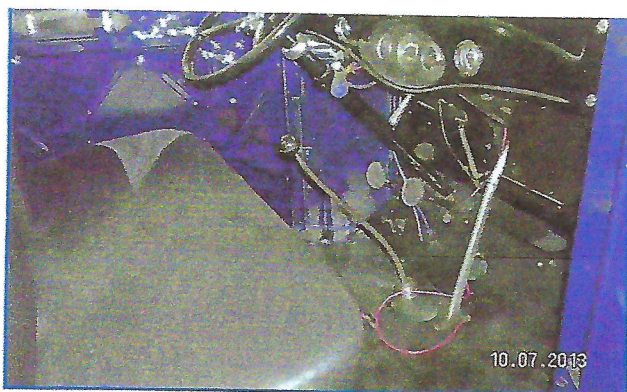
It was Shakespeare who once likened "the tidings of calamity" to "an unseasonable stormy day". Well, I thought, maybe one bad day is not forever. It wasn't easy for me, but in due time, I told the shop that we would go ahead with the flathead swap on the truck (perhaps thinking Dick Ormiston's 1978 observation to myself even then, 'I think it's dumbness...").

Of course swapping a 1953 Mercury engine into a 1932 Model B chassis is NOT a simple drop-in. Out forever came the transmission and the torque tube, the radius rods



*New Pickup bed.*





and the radiator. A lot of stuff had to be changed. Much factory-originality had to be further obliterated, in addition to what I'd done already, but the men made it work.

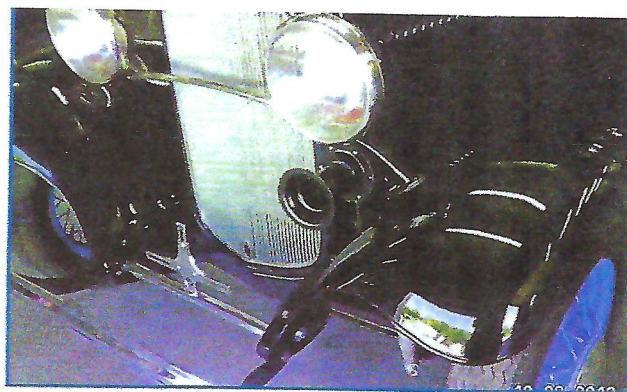
In about four months or so, I was back on the road in what-to-most-eyes-was just an old 1932 Ford Pickup. It'll never stand up to the slightest point Judging at a club meet, but I nevertheless have kept going, an old vehicle that I can own, drive and enjoy for what-it-is. And people who see it only as, "Wow, what a neat old truck" can still enjoy it too.

It's been said that misfortune tells us what fortune is. There's certainly something to that. These old vehicles, if you're going to drive them, you're going to have to work on them—including sometimes REALLY working one over—and anybody needs to set his or her expectations accordingly. I now know going in. For me, I have at least kept an 87-year-old Ford on the road, one that I can like and have fun with. For now, I think I will stay in the hobby—downs and ups and all.



**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** This old 1932 Ford Pickup came to my ownership as MUCH MORE of a project than I imagined (I was an "old vehicle" rookie). Yeah, I bought it "John Deere" Green. — Yuck!

I had the truck painted as part of its restoration: Black fenders, body-Andalusite Blue (a Model A Passenger car color). accent



wheels as follows...Model As featured a similar accent Blue wheels in Hessian Blue paired with Andalusite Blue; I chose a bit brighter blue than Hessian Blue but still in that same "accent Blue" family of colors: Brigade Blue (a 60s Chevrolet Pickup body color, brighter Blue than Hessian Blue).

Other than the fenders, not 1932 Ford commercial colors, admittedly. Probably no one will care about knowing the colors I employed. The true restorers (thank goodness for those dedicated persons) will be disgusted by my unfaithfulness to how the factory painted the truck, meaning my refusal to go with factory-used 1932 commercial body/wheel colors.

Respectfully, my little piece, "When Life Hands You Lemons..." picks up a different story: not of my restoration, but instead, a real punch in the gut (and I mean it) - I had the truck well-restored...THEN I, MYSELF, SUBSEQUENTLY RUINED THE RESTORED ENGINE

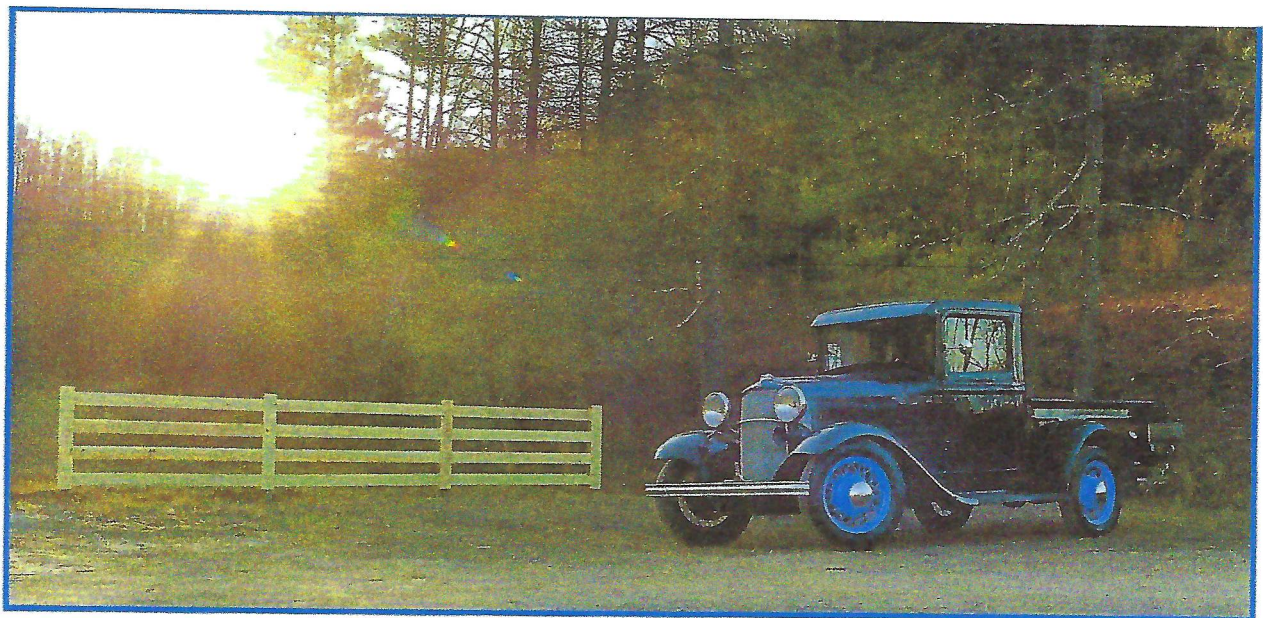
That's when I wanted to give up on the '32 truck—after I tore-up the restored engine, during the first year (thereabouts?).

I'm attempting to tell about a guy who buys an old vehicle, fixes it up, then tears up



*Two talented, modest guys: Gary Barnes and Don Barnes at Gilbert's Welding & Machine Shop in Centerville, Tennessee. They are a couple of Mr. Gilbert's ace workmen on vehicle restoration.*





*Photo by Chasity Goodner*

the original engine that he just had fixed and wants to quit the old car hobby at that point.

"I ain't gonna fix it twice -by G---." But I did. I had another engine put into it, kept it, have stayed in the hobby, and am happy I did. That's the story. I restored the truck, then life handed me lemons.

This is about how John Gilbert and his shop gave me hope to stay with the truck and stay in the hobby when I wanted to quit. That's the story.

The truck today? Well, would you believe that, for fun, I commuted in it, driving it to work every day (M-F) last week! Seriously. I'm in that old truck a lot. - Steve Jordan, Nashville, Tennessee

