

Ford's 1909 Cross Country Race

The last Ford-sponsored race of any note was that well-publicized event of 1909 in which two Model T Fords were entered in a coast to coast race, along with a number of other brands. One of the Fords came in first and was hailed as the winner but was later disqualified because of a possible engine change enroute. In spite of this sad turn of events, the Ford was first in the eyes of the public, if not in the history books.

Here is Ford's published story of that race.

THE STORY OF THE RACE

In March of 1909 there came into the office of the Ford Motor Company an announcement of a contest to be run under the auspices of the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition. This contest or race, if you prefer, was to start from New York City and end in Seattle. There were no restrictions as to size or power of cars, no schedules to make it a joy ride for contestants, no limitations to handicap any entry. It looked like a splendid chance for a car to prove its superiority. Mr. Ford at once decided to enter and so advised the Committee in charge of the arrangements.

A Race Full of Possibilities

It was expected not only by us but by those in charge, that the entry list would be large. Certainly no such chance had ever before been offered to prove the possibilities of the modern automobile. Here was no circular track event whereon a sudden short-lived burst of speed on the part of a possibly inferior car could bring home some unworthy contestant a much heralded winner. Unless the car was worthy, it would not finish. If the car were right, it could be expected to go through and any car that finished such a gruelling run would reflect credit on the manufacturer. And what a chance it offered not only to prove the claims each manufacturer



The start from New York



Ford Car Number 1

made for his car, but to bring out the weak points in design and construction and so offer an opportunity to improve the product through actual knowledge of the needs as brought out in service. At least Mr. Ford so regarded it and his entry was influenced thereby.

At first this seemed to be the general opinion and a large entry appeared assured; at one time there were thirty-five cars promised. These promises went as far as promises could without resolving themselves into signed entries. But investigations began to bring to light facts regarding the difficulties of the trip. Stories of the gumbo mud of the central west, of the sands of Wyoming and Idaho, the mountains from Colorado west, of the snow in many of the passes, began to appear. The big path-finder out two months, was still on the way. Then the enthusiasm dwindled. Many manufacturers appeared to be glad that no actual entry had been made. The possible entrants decreased in number - at times it appeared as if the two Fords would have no competition. Mr. Ford had however, decided to make the run, race or no race, for here was his chance to prove that a light weight car, well built, was the right car for every day, all-kinds-of-road use. Now that the race is finished we do not blame anyone for withdrawing. None but a light car had any right to consider such a trip.

Then the Manufacturers Contest Association passed resolutions disapproving the contest on the grounds that it encouraged violation of the speed laws, and that the contest offered too much opportunity for rebuilding cars enroute. The rules were accordingly amended and a daily schedule as far west as St. Louis arranged. West of that the conditions of the roads would prevent speed law violations. The rules were also revised so as to insure against any chance of rebuilding cars or replacing parts



Ford Car Number 2

enroute. But these changes had no effect on the entry list. However, the contest had the sanction of the Automobile Club of America and this Club could not be induced to reconsider, though much influence was brought to bear upon it.

Opposition to the Race

No race ever run encountered one-tenth as much opposition as did this Transcontinental Contest for the M. Robert Guggenheim trophy. Ascribe it to whatever reason you desire - the ruling of the Manufacturers Contest Association, excess of business or a knowledge of the inability of the product to go through creditably. The actual starters were: -

No. 1-Ford Model "T"
Frank Kulick and H. B. Harper.

No. 2-Ford Model "T"
Bert Scott and C. J. Smith.

Each 4 cyl. 20 h.p., 1200 lbs.

No. 3-Sterns, Model 30-60
4 cyl. 46 h.p., 4600 lbs.

Started two days late owing to reported engine difficulty.

No. 4 -Acme, 6 cyl. 48 h.p., 3500 lbs., \$4500.00.
No. 5-Shawmut, 4 cyl. 45 h.p., 4500 lbs., \$4500.00.
No. 6-Itala, 4 cyl. 50-60 h.p., app. 4000 lbs.

The Ford cars were assigned numbers one and two, as they were the first cars to enter.

By referring to the map, it will be noted that there were thirty cities between New York and Seattle to which all cars must travel, there to receive passports. As all cars passed through all these cities, any route between could be followed.

From New York to St. Louis

The start was made at 3 P.M., June 1st from the City Hall, New York City. President Taft at Washington touched a golden key which simultaneously opened the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition at Seattle and started the race from New York. Mayor McClellan announced the start with a shot fired from a golden pistol. The race was on.

A Ford Model K 6-40 roadster had been selected as official pacemaker s car to St. Louis, and this car, driven by F. W. Teves and carrying Pacemaker John Gerrie, preceded the cars on this part of the journey.

HENRY FORD HAD THIS TO SAY
about automobile racing:

From: *My Life and Work*, by Henry Ford, in collaboration with Samuel Crowther (1923).

When it was found that an automobile really could go and several makers started to put out cars, the immediate query was as to which would go fastest. It was a curious but natural development - that racing idea. I never thought anything of racing, but the public refused to consider the automobile in any light other than as a fast toy. Therefore later we had to race. The industry was held back by this initial racing slant, for the attention of the makers was diverted to making fast rather than good cars. It was a business for speculators.

In talking about the period after the Detroit Automobile Company failure, Ford said:

Most of the experimenting went into the building of racing cars. The idea in those days was that a first-class car ought to be a racer. I never really thought much of racing, but following the bicycle idea, the manufacturers had the notion that winning a race on a track told the public something about the merits of an automobile - although I can hardly imagine any test that would tell less.

But, as the others were doing it, I, too, had to do it. In 1903, with Tom Cooper, I built two cars solely for speed. They were quite alike. One we named the "999" and the other the "Arrow. If an automobile were going to be known for speed, then I was going to make an automobile that would be known wherever speed was known. These were. I put in four great big cylinders giving 80 H.P. -which up to that time had been unheard of. The roar of those cylinders alone was enough to half kill a man. There was only one seat. One life to a car was enough. I tried out the cars. Cooper tried out the cars. We let them out at full speed. I cannot describe the sensation. Going over Niagara Falls would have been but a pastime after a ride in one of them. I did not want to take the responsibility of racing the "999" which we put up first, neither did Cooper. Cooper said he knew a man who lived on speed, that nothing could go too fast for him. He wired to Salt Lake City and on came a professional bicycle rider named Barney Oldfield. He had never driven a motor car, but he liked the idea of trying it. He said he would try anything once.

It took us only a week to teach him how to drive. The man did not know what fear was. All

that he had to learn was how to control the monster. Controlling the fastest car of today was nothing compared to controlling that car. The steering wheel had not yet been thought of. All the previous cars I had built simply had tillers. On this one I put a two-handled tiller, for holding the car in line required all the strength of a strong man. The race for which we were working was at three miles on the Grosse Pointe track. We kept our cars as a dark horse. We left the predictions to the others. The tracks then were not scientifically banked. It was not known how much speed a motor car could develop. No one knew better than Oldfield what the turns meant and as he took his seat, while I was cranking the car for the start, he remarked cheerily: "Well, this chariot may kill me, but they will say afterward that I was going like hell when she took me over the bank.

And he did go He never dared to look around. He did not shut off on the curves. He simply let that car go-and go it did. He was about half a mile ahead of the next man at the end of the race!

The "999" did what it was intended to do: It advertised the fact that I could build a fast motor car. A week after the race I formed the Ford Motor Company.?

Reminiscing about the early years, Ford continued--

That "Model B" - the first four-cylinder car for general road use-had to be advertised. Winning a race or making a record was then the best kind of advertising. So I fixed up the "Arrow", the twin of the old "999" -in fact I practically remade it-and a week before the New York Automobile Show I drove it myself over a surveyed mile straightaway on the ice. I shall never forget that race. The ice seemed smooth enough, so smooth that if I had called off the trial we should have secured an immense amount of the wrong kind of advertising, but instead of being smooth, that ice was seamed with fissures which I knew were going to mean trouble the moment I got up speed. But there was nothing to do but go through with the trial. and I let the old "Arrow" out. At every fissure the car leaped into the air. I never knew how it was coming down. When I wasn't in

† Always modest, this is what Ford said in 1923. The facts were that the company was formed by others, Alexander Malcomson being the principal organizer, with Ford contributing his name and talents to the new company but not one dime of his money.

By referring to the rules as printed on page 24 [of the original booklet] it will be noted that the first days run terminated at Poughkeepsie - only 73 miles - but it lay in the mountains and the three hours and forty minutes required to traverse that distance reflects credit on all the cars. The Ford car No. 1 arrived there with the Pacemaker - the other entrants all arrived within twenty minutes.

The run to St. Louis arranged by daily schedule passed without incident unless the arrival of both the Fords together and from two to six hours in advance of any competitor at the various controls can be cited as interesting incidents.

Buffalo to Cleveland, 196 miles, was made by the two Ford cars in seven hours and thirty minutes, these cars passing all contestants and arriving at Cleveland one hour and fifteen minutes ahead. Then leaving Cleveland, all contestants together and in the rain, the 125 miles to Toledo was a drive through the mud. Here the light Ford cars had the advantage, and arrived in Toledo ahead of schedule, the only cars to arrive on time and four hours ahead of the Shawmut, the next to arrive.

Quoting Pacemaker, John Gerrie:-

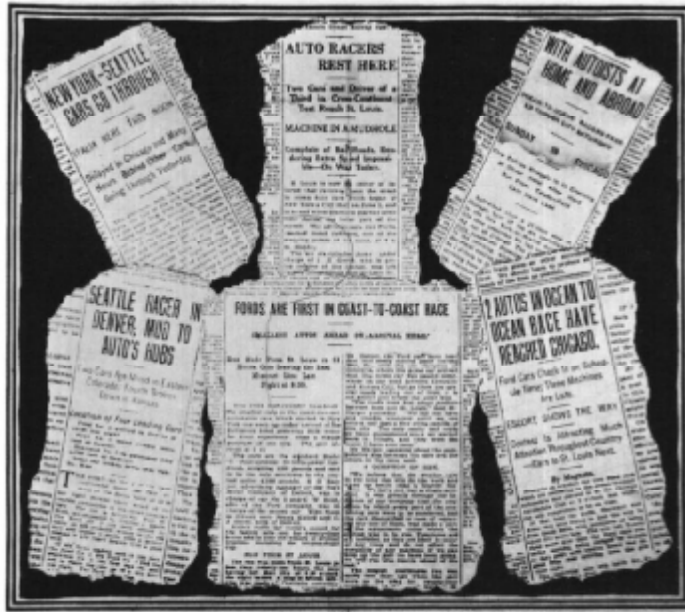
"The tenacity of the little Ford contestants was an eye-opener to me, said Mr. Gerrie. "Though I made the pace in a six cylinder car that took the grades as easily as the levels I found it impossible ever to get away from the midget competitors. On the famous Tribes Hill in the Mohawk Valley and the heartbreaking Camillus Hill near Syracuse, Ford car No. 2 actually beat the pacemaker to the top.

- N.Y. Herald



Entering Cleveland

the air, I was skidding, but somehow I stayed top side up and on the course, making a record that went all over the world! That put the "Model B" on the map-but not enough on to overcome the price advances. No stunt and no advertising will sell any article for any length of time. Business is not a game.



But leaving St. Louis at 8 P.M. on June 6th inaugurated the real competition in the race. Across the state lay Kansas City. Most of the distance between the roads ran from bad to medium, for there had been a great deal of rain for some weeks previous. The two Fords arrived together - first by over two hours, having made the run in twenty hours and forty minutes, a new record for the run across the state.

Leaving Kansas City in the rain, we encountered an almost continuous spell of wet weather for several days. Every day we wore rubber coats and hip boots and pushed through mile after mile of mud. The monotony of this was frequently varied by having to ford a stream where the unusual rain fall had washed away the bridge. Often these swollen streams had beds of quicksand and the car striking them would instantly sink until the body resting on the sand prevented further settling. Then we

thanked our lucky stars that we of the Ford crews were driving light cars. Where a heavy car had to resort to horses and a block and tackle, the two men in each Ford car could pick up their car, place the wheels on planks and proceed across. In all this clinging, clayey mud, quicksand and washouts, neither Ford had to resort to outside power for assistance. They got out of every difficulty without calling for aid. This had quite a bearing on the winning of the race.

Number Two in the Ditch

Ford No. 2 had proceeded but a few miles out of Kansas City when an accident befell it which for a time seemed likely to put the car out of the race. About 11 P.M. on June 7th a heavy storm arose causing the crew of Ford No. 1 to cease operations until morning. Driver Scott in Ford No. 2 decided to push ahead and make Topeka. In the slippery mud the car skidded down a fourteen foot embankment into a stream, throwing Scott and Smith into the water. There the car lay until morning when the other Ford car came along, helped pull Number 2 back on the road and then proceeded. The axle was badly bent, for the drop had been sudden. Taking it out, Scott and Smith walked three miles to a blacksmith shop, straightened the axle, returned, replaced it and started again. They were now six hours behind. Ford 1 made Manhattan and Ellsworth first and there waited for Ford 2 and together the two Fords proceeded toward Denver.

And still it rained - not your ordinary showers, but hard pelting torrents when the heavens seemed to open and pour out their contents in floods. Roads ceased to be anything but mud trails and waterways. The fields provided better going than the highways. Mile after mile cross country made fast time impossible. In fifteen hours



Ford Car No. 1 leaves Shoshone, Idaho

on June 11th the two Ford cars covered 90 miles. Five inches of water fell June 10th and 11th.

Quicksand Opposition

Thirty-five miles east of Denver both Ford cars got into the quicksand in the bed of Sand Creek. We were thirty feet from shore and working in water up to our waists. If we had not had light cars we might have been there yet, but with the aid of the roof of a deserted pig pen which roof we shoved under the wheels after lifting the back end of the car, we got both cars out and made Denver. Ford No. 2 was now in the lead but by only a few minutes.

The Ford No. 2 and the Shawmut left Denver together. The Ford made Cheyenne first by forty-five minutes. The race was surely close.

Frank Kulick in charge of Ford No. 1, having in mind the hard going ahead, had decided to go over every part of his car to make sure all was right. This put No. 1 third, about six hours behind at Cheyenne, Wyoming.

It continued to rain. When it rains in Wyoming it does not make much mud. It just pours down the mountain sides and cuts sluiceways across the road at intervals of about fifty feet. These ditches run about eighteen inches deep and offer considerable difficulty to automobiles.

Faster than Railroad Schedule

It was interesting, however, to compare the time we were able to make with railroad schedule. Leaving Cheyenne at 11 A.M. we noticed No. 3, the China-Japan fast mail on the Union Pacific, just pulling out. Laramie is fifty-seven miles west of Cheyenne. The schedule for this train calls for arrival in Laramie at 2:15 P.M. The train winds in and out around the mountains - the automobile road goes straight over them. We left with the train and it pulled away. Five times we met and the passengers displayed a continually increasing interest. They began to watch for us. We arrived in Laramie five minutes ahead of the train.

Rawlins, Wyoming, was next and the Ford cars were now first and second, To get into Rawlins necessitated using the railroad ties for a mile, this including the approach to and the railroad bridge over the Platte River at Fort Steele. The track was not ballasted and the ties fifteen to eighteen inches apart. Our thirty inch wheels

hit every separate tie a distinct and separate bump and each car came into Rawlins with a broken wheel. It delayed us twelve hours making repairs and we were now second and third.

At Granger Ford No. 2 was twenty-five minutes behind the Shawmut, having gained six hours. Ford No. 1 was third, one hour behind.

Leaving the Old Route

Up to Granger, Wyoming, the route had followed the path of previous transcontinentalists, but from this point the other trips had been made via the southern route across Utah and Nevada into California. This route had been considered easier than the northern one into Seattle on account of the mountains to be crossed. But our route was the northern so we left the old trail at Granger and started on that part of the trip which no automobile had before made without railroad aid.

At Opal all three cars met and a storm starting, all crews slept there until daybreak. At Kemmerer just as we finished breakfast, the Shawmut crew came into the lunch room. These but serve to show how close and exciting the race became from time to time. But Kemmerer was the last time Ford car No. 1 saw any competitor until the arrival in Seattle, and but for an accident at Cokeville, Wyoming, to Ford car No. 2, they too would have seen no competing car again until the finish.

Ford Number One in the Lead

By continuous riding Ford car No. 1 made Pocatello, Idaho, on June 17th at 2:30 A.M. If you want any excitement, try that run into Pocatello from Opal to Montpelier, and Montpelier to Pocatello after a heavy rain. If you do not get enough in the daytime, try it after dark. But look out for Nugget and Bancroft Canyons. There are down grades there, several of them up to 1,000 feet in length, averaging 30% where the roadway in places is six inches wider than the car tread and a slip means dashing hundreds of feet onto the rocks below. But don't do it unless you have a good driver, a cool, steady, level headed man, for the excitement may be too great.

Lost

Ford car No. 1 was now nine hours ahead and the car running better than ever. We began to plan on what



to do with our money. We might better have saved our breath. For then did we pick up for a pilot, a "greaser" whose previous experience must have been largely confined to piloting schooners over the bar. He was sure bone-headed and he certainly proceeded to lose Ford No. 1. He got us into the north end of the Great American Desert where we averaged four miles an hour. Then when we overcame this, he lost the road again and that night instead of hustling toward Boise, we slept in the sage bush out in the plain, *suns* gasoline and oil and fifty miles off the roads.

By the time we had walked three miles, pumped a hand car six more, flagged a passenger and proceeded to Shoshone, Idaho, for fuel and oil, then borrowed a car to carry it back and again started for Twin Falls, we had lost twenty-four hours.

Prizes to Scott

But Ford No. 2 was in the lead, the nearest competitor was temporarily broken down at Bancroft. Ford No. 2 made Boise first and received one hundred dollars for that - it made Wieser, Idaho, first and Baker City, Oregon, and then Walla Walla, Washington. It received the silver cup offered by the "Western Motor Car" for the first car to enter the State of Washington. It made North Yakima still further in the lead, crossed the dreaded snow covered Snoqualmie Pass and landed in Seattle at noon, June 23rd, 1909, the winner in seventeen hours, having covered the 4106 miles in twenty days, fifty-two minutes official time. The official time deducts the time spent in controls east of St. Louis.

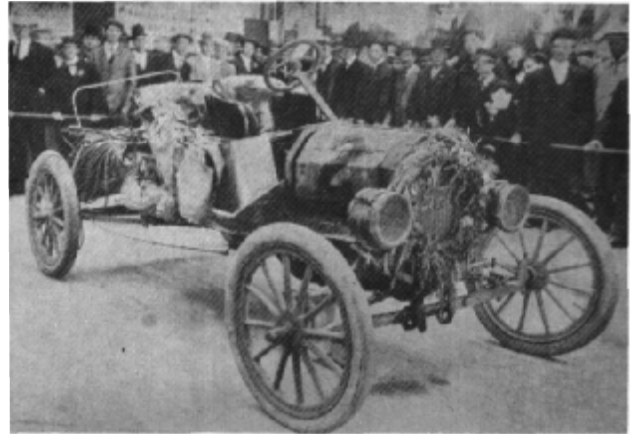
Ill Luck for Ford Number One

Meanwhile the other Ford was racing west and making excellent time. It was gaining and looking for second place. We stopped for nothing now. Our car was running better than when we started. Each city reported us as gaining. We crossed the Blue Mountains and entered Walla Walla and we found we had passed our rivals and were again second - only the other Ford ahead. But it was never intended we should win. At Wallula we picked another bone-headed specimen for a pilot. This road juggler lost us in what is known as the Horse Heaven Country and when we should have been in Prosser, Washington, we were in Mottinger.

Any jury in the land would have brought in a verdict of justifiable homicide if we had followed our inclination in regard to the excess baggage that had hired out as pilot to us. We had to travel the ties on the S. P. and S. R. R. for eight miles to Plymouth. Part of the distance was through a tunnel dark as night and just wide enough for that single track. The road was entirely lost in the sand. In that country the sand drifts and blows with every puff of wind - a sand storm that was a veritable blizzard of sand had raged around us for hours. To have stopped anywhere on that desert for the night would have meant being buried in the sand. In places it had blown in piles as high as a three story building.

Ford Number Two Set on Fire

But we got out though another day had been lost and



On exhibition at the Fair

Ford No. 1 was again third. We made Prosser the next day and there learned that Ford No. 2 came close to being destroyed by fire. While filling with gasoline, some sport with less sense than is usually allotted even to those we coop up in asylums for the weak-minded struck a match on the side of the gasoline tank. Fifteen gallons of gasoline and the major portion of the outfit were burned and the tank sprung a leak, causing considerable inconvenience for the balance of the journey.

Snoqualmie Pass

For weeks before the race we had been regaled with items concerning Snoqualmie Pass, the final stage of the journey. Report had it that perpetual snow lay deep on the roadway, snow from five to fifty feet in depth. snow that no automobile had ever surmounted. They told us how the Thomas sixty pathfinder had crossed on a flat car, how Mr. Guggenheim's big car had done likewise. We were almost as scared of that pass as must have been some of those entrants who failed to start. We of Ford No. 1 were pushing on the hope that here we would again overtake our up to that time luckier competitors. Ford No. 2 was reported stuck in the pass, the Shawmut was said to be in the ditch. But it was not so. Just before we started the ascent we learned of Scott's safe and triumphal arrival in Seattle - at the summit we got word of the Shawmut's getting in.

We were on the top of the last difficulty. We had pushed through the snow with less trouble than we had expected. We would be in Seattle by four o'clock. When a rock hidden in the mud and snow sprang up to give us one last foul blow. For seven hours we worked on top of the mountain up among the clouds remedying the trouble that rock had caused. At 5 P.M. we were going again. A half mile over the ties of the new "Milwaukee" railroad brought us down grade and ninety miles from the finish. The rest was easy.

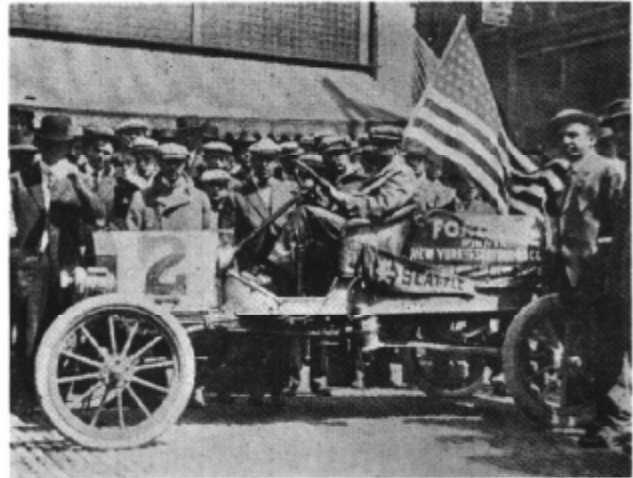
One week later the Acme landed in Seattle, the Itala followed on a freight car and telegraphic inquiries

revealed that the Sterns had never gotten out of New York State.

We finished third but with the knowledge that Scott and Smith in the other Ford were first, and that with an even break in luck, Fords would have been first and second. The winner had covered 4106 miles of the hardest, toughest going imaginable, had made New York to Seattle in twenty days and fifty-two minutes official time and had thereby forcibly demonstrated the superiority of the Light Weight Ford for all sorts of road conditions.

The Winning Ford Making the Return Trip

On July 9th, after leaving the car at the Exposition for over two weeks, Bert Scott and C. J. Smith started back across the Continent in the car they had so successfully piloted into Seattle. The return trip includes a journey south to San Francisco and Los Angeles, then following the Southern Pacific across Nevada and Utah at Granger, strike the same road [on] which they went West. No attempt at speed is being made - just such a tour as any man might make for the pleasure of it. They are combining vacation and business, stopping over where they see fit, calling on dealers enroute, and in various ways making a less strenuous trip than that which the race enforced.



Starting back

BACK ISSUES AVAILABLE

The following is a list of back issues of *The Vintage Ford* which are currently available. Supplies of some are quite limited and will be sold on a first-come, first-sold basis. These issues are available at \$2.00 each, post-paid by Second Class Mail.

- Vol. 7, No. 2 The Chevrolet Story, 1911 to 1927
- Vol. 7, No. 5 James Couzens, 1911 Torpedo Runabout, Stromberg Carburetor, Catalina Caper III.
- Vol. 8, No. 3 1917-1920 Fords, Vintage Ford Index.
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- Vol. 9, No. 1 Ford Shops, March '25 Ford Pictorial.
- Vol. 9, No. 2 Model T Tank, 1909 Ford, Baja 1000.
- Vol. 9, No. 3 Ford Industries, Alaska in a Model T.
- Vol. 9, No. 4 Model T in Racing, Ford Shops.
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- Vol. 9, No. 6 Across the Sahara in a T, The Five Dollar Day, Model S Tourabout, Making a Wheel.
- Vol. 10, No. 1 Shipping the Ford, The Ruckstell Axle, Ford's 1921 Crisis.
- Vol. 10, No. 2 Ford Factory Facts, Rewinding a Magneto Coil, Replacement Ignition Switch.
- Vol. 10, No. 3 1911 Fords, Engine Assembly.
- Vol. 10, No. 4 Model T Speedsters, Metal Work, Wood Bending.
- Vol. 10, No. 5 1925 National Tours, Repairing Brass Lamps, Model T Tractors.
- Vol. 10, No. 6 1920 Ford Touring, Ford Shops.

We still have a few earlier issues which have been left on consignment by early members who have no further need for them. These are offered at \$5 per copy, post-paid. Since the supply changes almost constantly, write your needs and we will advise; or call the editor at (213) 842-2010 for a quick check.

All orders for back issues must be accompanied with a check or money order. Refunds are promptly made if any issue is out of stock. Send your orders to:

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