

MODEL A's in WA
1928 AR Phaeton
Number plate: GN 02
Restored by Eric Richards
Owned by Eric and Jeannane RICHARDS
1970s - 1991
(when it was sold to Merv and Thelma Callow)

Information from Tom Hart.

Scribe: Alan Jeffree - May 2013



Introduction: It has been difficult to compile Eric's Phaeton Story due to lack of exact knowledge with his passing in 1989. Most of the facts presented here are thanks to long-time club member, Tom Hart, who lives in Ongerup and was a good friend of Eric's from their days together. Tom has emailed me on many occasions in recent months and when I quote his words they will be typed in italics. Tom's information has been invaluable. I will commence by quoting Tom's first email following the February 2013 Club Newsletter. Members might like to revisit Tom's own Model A story which is on our web pages under "Members Cars".

Hi Alan! I have just read with great interest the article on Bob and Jeanette Hembrough's Model A. I know this car well. I first saw it sitting in Eric Richards and Staff workshop under a tarp for about two years before he started on it. It was a pretty good car before restoration as I recall. Eric told me it was in fact built in 1927 and was one of the first Model A's to come into WA. He moved it into his home workshop for the restoration and I watched the whole process unfold, fascinated. It was at this time I started working on my Model A ute. As you know I finally got it pretty good. Eric gave me a lot of help and inspiration. I have followed Eric's car with interest over the years. He was a real Ford man and left us far too young.

Kindest regards.

Tom

Eric and Jeannane were founding members of our Club and were one family out of thirteen represented at the inaugural June Meeting in 1980.

For interest, the other families represented at that first meeting were – Bill and Dorothy Bennie, Kelvin Pepper, Geoff Davies, Max Annear, Eric Richards, Mike and Laurel Cooke, Ian Paisley, Don Philp, V Sinagra, N and L Lopez, Ray Mahony, Bill Spencer and Alex Kirkwood. Other listed members at the time were – Alan and June Smith, Tom and Georgina Hart, Ken and Enid Harris. These last three families were country members.

Before retiring to Gooseberry Hill, Eric was the Ford Dealer in Gnowangerup. While there he collected numerous Model A vehicles and a 1932 Sports Coupe. He restored a Tudor and the Phaeton.

Email sent to Alan 20th February 2013:

Mike Brown who worked for Eric in the seventies eventually took over the business from Eric and his staff. He has been selling Fords since those days and is now in Albany with Barnesby Ford.

Mike reckons Eric was the best Spray painter he ever saw. He started out as a panel beater spray painter working at Hendry's, the Holden dealer in Gnowangerup. Gnowangerup and District Motors, the Ford dealer, was going to close. It was being run as a part of the Gnowangerup Cooperative and was losing money.

Eric saw an opportunity and in November 1965 took on the Ford Dealership. He prospered, trading as Eric Richards and Staff and at one stage employed eighteen people. He had a large panel shop, workshop/servicing and parts. There was always a shiny new Ford or two in the showroom. All of his trade-ins were tidied up and sent to Perth.

Tom Hart's email to Alan March 2013:

Mike does not remember where Eric's Phaeton came from. He does remember it was a local car and was green.

Tom spent a fair bit of time watching the restoration.

It was a body off and everything was done properly. Eric would say 'I am ordering king pins (or something) and do you want some for yours?' That's how I accumulated parts for ours. (Tom and Georgina have a nicely restored Model A Ute.) Eric got me the nice red steering wheel which is on ours now. The restoration was done in the small workshop at the back of their house. The engine was rebuilt but had a vibration. Eric changed the crankshaft and solved the problem. The nickel on the radiator and headlights was redone as was ours at the same time. Ours went rusty a few years later unfortunately. I am not sure how Eric's went!

The upholstery was done by Frank Crawford in East Perth.

Eric also had a beautiful Tudor (dark Green) which is now owned by John Pitts of Mount Barker. I see it around from time to time. He knew Eric well, being a fellow Ford Dealer, and he may be worth talking to some time!

I called at his Gooseberry Hill home one day and he also had a lovely blue 1936 Ford Coupe. He was restoring a 1937 Ford Sedan at the time, He asked me to let him have my original number plate GN 07 for his 1937 Sedan. I let him have it and I got GN 010

Eric had talked the local shire into these low new numbers for vintage cars. (Good talker, Eric!)

Email Tom sent to Alan 7th March 2013

I have some more information on Eric's car.

Eric bought it off Sophie Stone whose father was Berti Kingston. We are pretty sure he bought it new. At least he had it for a very long time if he didn't buy it new! Berti Kingston was a Borden farmer and daughter Sophie married a local farmer Mr Peter Stone. (I know their sons Andrew and John). John still farms the same farm today. Sophie's husband Peter died prematurely at around the late 30's.

Sophie is in failing health now but Mike Brown and his wife Jeanie got this information from Jeannane Richards. Jeanie Brown, also a Borden girl, recalls the car so the story is confirmed. Mike and Jeanie farmed nearby in Borden before he went to work for Eric in the Ford dealership.

The Model A was stored for many years in a shed after Sophie finished primary school (she drove it to the bus stop) until Eric got his hands on it. Sophie's husband Peter was collecting old cars in the seventies and when he died, Sophie inherited them.

I bought a Model A Tudor from her as well, which was part of her husband's collection. I did a barter deal with Eric and he ended up with it and restored it beautifully. It is now owned by John Pitts in Mount Barker.

There were a lot of old cars in sheds in those days, but not now. Mind you I put our 1996 Fairlane in our shed about four years ago. Still a good car!

Sincere thanks to Tom Hart, a personal friend of Eric's and a real Model A (Ford) enthusiast, for this valuable information, his research and his personal records. This article has provided the most complete history of one Model A in our completed Model A stories! All 85 years of its life and still going strong thanks to many caring owners, and currently with Brian and Ruth Walsh in Gibson!

In 1991 the 1928 AR Phaeton was sold to Merv and Thelma Callow who were great friends of Eric and Jeannane. Eric had other collectable vehicles and they all took some time to sell after his passing. Merv Callow and our member Reg Blewett would visit Jeannane and start the vehicles up and keep them saleable. Reg purchased the desirable 1932 Sports Coupe.



Tom's Ute followed by Eric's Phaeton.

This photo was taken in April 1979.

It was the Sesquicentenary Day run by the Gnowangerup Shire. I ran the Councillor who organised it to check on the date. (Flier below)

The Phaeton was recently completed.

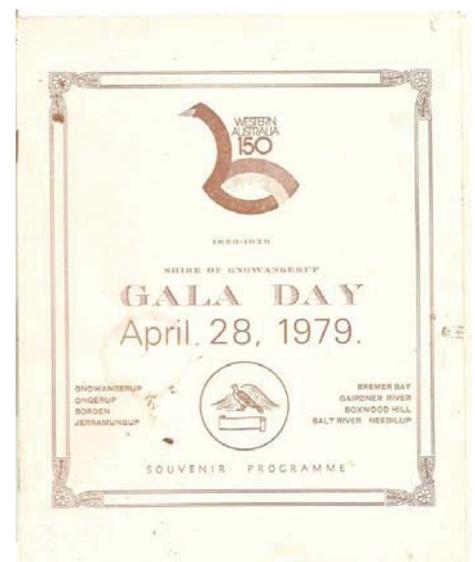
Eric and Jeannane moved to Perth soon after this time.

Tom Hart



When Eric and Jeannane moved to Gnowangerup they lived in the building where he restored the Model A Phaeton before building their new home. The shed had a timber floor, was lined, had a kitchen at the front and was a bit bigger than a one car garage. This meant the shed was pretty dust proof.

Tom





Top left:

This is Eric's house and shed at the rear where he restored the Model A (and others) and lived here until he built the new home in the sixties. It looks identical to when they lived there. I sold it last year for the people who bought it off Eric. The office had these photos on file.

Tom

Above: A page out of the Gnowangerup local paper from 1955.

This was the Ford business which Eric took over.

Tom

Thanks to Tom who kept this copy for posterity. AJ

Left: A copy of the letter which was sent out to all members of the newly formed Model A Restorers Club (W.A. Branch) Inc in August 1980.

Another document kept for posterity by Tom.

The club became the Model A Restorers Club of WA (Inc.) in July 1992.

