ALEX KIRKWOOD'S STORY

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The July 2006 issue of Model A News covered the story of an A Model in Derby and on reading this I felt inspired to write a few words in relation to an A Model that I grew up with. When I was studying for my Leaving Certificate in 1963, at age 17, my father had a serious talk to me and told me to focus on my studies and forget the A Model.... He then went on to say that I would grow out of this obsession that I had with the A ..... My father wasn't wrong very often, but in the latter phase of his life we still joked about that comment and how wrong it was. I have always had a deep passion for 28/29 A Models and maybe the story below will reveal the reasons why...so here goes.

Alex Kirkwood

WHY AN A

As a member of the Model A Restorers Club, people may ask...why restore an A Model? In my case I didn't stand a chance.

I was born in 1946 in Boulder and at that time, my father had already owned an A Model for 7 years, having purchased "Lizzie" for 25 pounds in 1939.

Lizzie was in fact a tourer that had been converted to the Aussie ute style and was used primarily by my dad as transport to and from work in the mines, to collect wood from the bush and to cart gear in relation to a hobby of gold prospecting.

You will note that Lizzie is referred to as an A Model. My father and other guys of that era referred to A Models and I never heard the term Model A used in conversation, although Model A is clearly the American terminology.

I can remember the A from way back when I used to go with my father and grandfather to collect wood. I can still remember clearly that Lizzie had a huge ability to cart a lot of wood and I still remember the spring (which had extra leaves) laying almost flat on the diff housings, but we always got home. (I was in serious trouble when I was about 16 and broke that spring as a result of pushing the old girl a little too fast through a creek bed.)

After the war in 1948, dad decided to have Lizzie's engine rebuilt and this was undertaken by "Jack Hehir's Ford House" in Kalgoorlie. The rebuild was extensive and I still have the original invoices which show the total cost to be 37 pounds. As an example, 4 new 30th O/S pistons cost 4 pounds, a set of 8 valves cost 2 pound 7 shillings and so the list goes on. I also have the Motor Spirit Consumers License together with some unused 2-gallon ration tickets relative to Lizzie. These were last used in February 1950.

As a kid, I can remember being out prospecting in the A and recall one occasion when we were travelling slowly along a bush track and my father was paying so much attention to a small goldmine that he got off course and hit a low tree stump. This rearranged the front axle and broke the bell housing where the radius rod attached. Some ingenuity got us home and the old girl was returned to working order ready for the next weekend. On another occasion, part of the original fan dislodged and put a small dent in the side of the bonnet. A 4 blade fan was then fitted.

From an early age I became quite passionate about the A and learnt to drive Lizzie at age 12 ....and it didn't take long to take off without stalling as if I did stall the engine, my father would simply hand me the crankhandle.

As a young bloke I looked for every excuse to drive the ute and by the time license time had arrived, I was quite an experienced bush driver....but things were a little different in Boulder in the 1960's.

At age 16 while in Perth I purchased a Floyd Clymer publication titled "How to Restore the Model A Ford". At that time I began to tidy the A which included painting the engine green and painting the front and back axles silver...which was the "in" thing at the time. I also added some stripes to the radiator

shell, but I was overruled on that and had to repaint the shell. This was clearly the beginning of a restoration bug.

For my leaving certificate (TEE) mechanical drawing project, I prepared a series of drawings of an A engine. The scales were taken from the above mentioned book and an old engine block that I had acquired. I still have these drawings and they even show Lizzie's engine number (CA 47519).

The leaving certificate was an interesting exercise as I was so taken with the A that I was continually told to forget Lizzie and concentrate on my studies, but that was not easy. I even resorted to sitting in the shed in the old girl to quietly read my textbooks.

Once I turned 17 I was able to cruise the streets, but when the A ran into engine trouble, I convinced my father to purchase a B Model engine from a wrecker named Reg Adams in Kalgoorlie. We had this engine rebored and Dad taught me how to scrape white metal bearings and how to assemble the motor. I converted this engine to fit the A (I still have this engine) and then purchased a better radiator for 10 bob (also still have) which allowed prolonged travel and we had fantastic fun wandering far and wide around the goldfields. The attached photo with the 3 guys (that's me in the overalls) was taken south of what is now Kambalda, but the road to get there at that stage was a rough gravel road called Celebration Road for part of the way and then a rough bush track. But despite our travels, we never broke down and always got home.

I remember taking the A to the drive-in one Saturday night in Kalgoorlie with some mates. We didn't like the movie so part way through I proceeded to crank the old girl, but I had the throttle down a little too far and she roared on starting, which woke every one up. My mother and father were also at the drive-in in their Zephyr, and dad later advised that he was so embarrassed that he simply faced the front and pretended that he didn't hear anything.

In 1965, at age 19, I moved to Perth to commence work with Alcoa as a trainee Accountant, but I refused to part with Lizzie and left it with an Auntie in Boulder.

Having met Linda, we often travelled to Boulder and old Lizzie was always given a touch of exercise in the bush.

In 1972, Linda and I had been married for 4 years and given that I had graduated as an accountant, I was granted permission to bring my old mate to Perth.

It was decided that restoration was a tall order, so we purchased our current A from its original owner and then restored that vehicle over a 2.5 year period.

Some minor parts of Lizzie were used, but I had the foresight to dismantle the old girl and store the parts away.

Some 34 years have passed since 1972 and would you believe that Lizzie is to be resurrected once more. This process will commence within the next 6 months, once I complete my current restoration project.

Many years ago I purchased a rough Ford A factory ute from Peter Marley in Wagin and this vehicle has allowed me to see exactly how these vehicles were constructed.

The plan is to restore Lizzie using its original bodywork up to the edge of the rear doors and then fabricate the rear in accordance with the factory ute specs. The original engine (CA47519) and that 10 bob radiator will be used, together with that bonnet with the small dent where the fan took off.

There is enormous nostalgic value in this vehicle and I am looking forward to recreating the dark blue paintwork with black guards and once again cruising the highway. The only thing different will be the colour of the hair.

Alex Kirkwood











Top left: South of where Kambalda now is, 1963.

Top right: On a little used road, 1963.

Centre: Old Lizzie in Alex's parents' back yard in Boulder

Bottom left: In Boulder 1965.

Bottom right: With constant A passenger Mitzie.