THOUGHTS FROM THE MODEL T GARAGE...

By Ed Meloan

At our last meeting there was a brief discussion about the wire spoke wheels that were available of the 1926 and 27 Fords. These are popular wheels and I think there's good reason for that. These wheels were quite an engineering marvel when they first appeared. They were a solid welded unit which was very strong, durable and attractive in appearance.

The Model A Ford used the same design during all the years it was manufactured and the Model A and Model T wheels look alike to the casual observer. Model A wheels are different though. They have a slightly larger hub and different placement of the lug bolt holes. While it's still not too hard to find good T wheels, they are not as easy to get as good model A ones and that has led some folks to use the 21 inch A wheels on their T's. While wheels are not too hard to find, wire wheel T hubs are getting harder to find and are becoming more expensive when you can find good ones.

Larry Noller (Noller Conversions) in Colorado now offers adaptors which allow you to use a set of the readily available T wood wheel hubs with either Model T or Model A wire wheels. You do have to order the adaptors for one or the other. They do not fit both because of the difference in hub bolt hole location. These adaptors are very well made and fit beautifully. Combine them with a set of easy to find wood wheel hubs and you have a very nice set of wire wheel hubs! Most T suppliers have the Noller adaptors but you may have to ask for them.

Model A wheels came in two sizes. If we want the ones that look like T wheels, we will need to find the 1928/29 wheels that are 21 inches in diameter. They have the same distinctive rolled rim edge that the 21 inch T wheels have. The 1930/31 A wheels are 19 inches in diameter and have a simpler flat rim edge similar to modern steel rims.

The distinctive "rolled" rim of the T and early A wheels is the first place we want to check when buying wheels. This rolled edge tended to trap moisture which caused rust and you'll find many of these wheels have small holes rusted completely through the inside area of the rolled edge where the tire is pressed against it. A few small holes do not necessarily mean the wheel is unusable but the more there are, the more concerned we should be about the weakness of the rim and the rust we can't see on the inside! A few small holes can be fixed easily with JB Weld which stays there nicely. If you have a choice use wheels which have solid rims but with care you can use less than perfect ones.

While looking at the rims, roll the wheel on a smooth level surface and watch it carefully. A good rim will roll smoothly! If the rim suddenly leans as it rolls, there's probably a flat spot caused by the rim being dropped against a hard surface. These flats can be corrected but it's better if we don't have to.

Look carefully for bent and broken spokes. Spokes can be straightened but they may indicate a blow which has caused the wheel to be bent and this will cause a wobble! Broken spokes can be welded back to the rim but again, the force that broke the spoke hints at possible wobble.

Next check the lug bolt holes. Look at the back side of the hole for cracks and enlarged holes which allow the hub bolt to come clear through the wheel! It's a good idea to use a good lug nut to check the holes.

If the wheel passes all these tests, bolt it on your front axle and spin it! Put a yard stick up against it and check for side wobble. There's usually a little. Anything less than 1/4 inch is probably acceptable. The less the better! Also look across the top as it spins and see if it wobbles up and down. Again, 1/4 inch should be the maximum and less is better.

These wheels are stronger and safer than the 80 year-old wood wheels and they look great!

See you down the road...