



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

About a dozen Model A cars navigate a country road near Pilot Rock during the recent Rough Riders Tour.

Love

at first drive



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Steve Plucker, of Prescott, Washington, waits in line to gas up his Model A in Ukiah during the recent Rough Riders Tour.

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

Greg West doesn't live in Umatilla County anymore, but he always enjoys coming back for a drive through the place where he fell in love.

Standing next to his 1928 Model A Ford, he recalled the first time he laid eyes on one of the vintage cars.

"I grew up up the street from McKay school (in Pendleton)," he said. "A guy showed up driving one. From the time I was about eight years old, I wanted one."

A few years later, West noticed a classmate, Jim Miller, driving one of the cars to high school.

"I made a point of introducing myself," West said. "We've been best friends since."

West and Miller were back in the area for the "Rough Riders" tour, where owners of Model A Fords from around the Pacific Northwest gather in one place and go for a weekend drive in their vehicles.

Of the 13 drivers at the Father's Day tour, only one lives in Umatilla County. Others drove out from Bend, Boise, Lewiston, La Center and Walla Walla. Many of them belong to Model A clubs in their own cities, but stay in touch with people regionally, too.

"I just decided I wanted to do something," said Pendleton resident Jack Remillard, a member of the Blue Mountain As club. "I sent out an email asking if anyone wanted to go for a drive in the mountains, and bang, short order, I got a response."

After a tour of the Weston area on June 15, the 13 cars made their way to the mountains southeast of Pilot Rock, where they spent the night at the home of Bonnie and Scott Sager.

Remillard led the train of cars from Pilot Rock on some gravel roads to Ukiah, and then west to Cutsforth Park in Heppner for lunch. The group meandered along backroads, enjoying the roadside dotted with wildflowers and stopping to let a large herd of elk pass. They bounced along a choppy stretch of road to Potamus Point, a canyon that



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Model A owners gas up their Model A cars in Ukiah during the recent Rough Riders Tour.

offers panoramic views as the John Day River cuts through it.

Throughout the trip, other drivers made way for the train of old-fashioned vehicles wending their way through the mountains, stopping to enjoy the scene that could have been straight out of the 1930s.

The cars, manufactured from 1928 to 1931, vary in body style and need constant, specific attention.

"I work on my car myself," West said. "You pretty much have to. You kind of have to know if something sounds uncomfortable. You're pretty much always listening for something."

"Every one is different and has its own personality," Remillard said. "Very little is electronic." He

noted that everything in the car has to be adjusted manually, and usually by the drivers themselves.

"For me, that's the reason to have it — it's fun to work on, and easy to work on if you're at all mechanical," he said.

Throughout the day-long trip, the drivers got the opportunity to demonstrate that skill, as cars stalled and stopped occasionally on some steep climbs.

"We call this a 'roadside seminar,'" Remillard said, as three or four drivers peered under the hood of one of the cars.

Though the cars need regular maintenance, they're also tough. Within the first 30 minutes of the drive, the cars drove through a 60-foot long mud puddle, which grazed their running boards.



Staff photo by Kathy Aney
(Far left) The Ford Model A first came on the market in 1927 and proved a big seller with 400,000 orders in less than two weeks.
(Left) A Model A owner takes photos of Potamus Canyon from Potamus Point near Ukiah.