

FAIRBANKS

Vernon L. Nash

ALASKA



Antique Automobile Club of America

THE MANY FACES OF THE 1955 PLYMOUTH STANDARD STEERING WHEEL

By Scott Grundy

Most of you know that I have a personal history and love affair with the 1955 Plymouth that started in the spring of 1958 when I purchased a convertible loaded with factory options. My wife and I traded this wonderful automobile for a truck to drive to Alaska in 1963. We never could get the ol' girl off our minds; so when we saw a similar beauty on eBay in 2005, we had to have her (see our full story in our April 2006 Newsletter). While asking the seller a myriad of questions before the bid date, I ragged on the poor chap about the steering wheel clock (nonworking as he hadn't fooled with the wiring) and the wire wheels as not being original equipment. He said they came with the car when he bought it and offered to remove the items to please me as a "knowledgeable" buyer. I'm so pleased I declined the offer. The clock turned out to be a very rare Plymouthmatic and the wire wheels could be ordered through the dealer from the Motorwheel Corporation.

The '55 Plymouths had a large standard steering wheel that contained a large chromed ring and/or horn bar with a removable center horn button. The most common button was of the Plymouth Mayflower sailing ship. Vehicles with power steering were equipped with a beautiful horn button stating such. All could be fitted with the optional steering wheel clock! However, cars equipped with both power steering and power brakes had a very attractive ivory-colored plastic "Hollywood" steering wheel that contained a fancy chromed center piece, but lacked the center horn button. So, ironically, the best equipped models were deprived



of the honor to sport the novel, and oh-so-cool, clock!

The "clock" is actually a WATCH made by Benrus. It used the same technology as a self-winding wristwatch but this version weighed nearly 13





ounces! It was wound by a counterweighted pendulum when the steering wheel was turned. This first version was a 15 jewel, made in Switzerland, eight day unit with a face that could be turned to wind the mechanism if necessary. The time could be reset by depressing the protruding button at the eleven o'clock position and rotating the face to correct the time. The moveable face also had a red arrow pointer that could be set at the beginning of a trip to monitor elapsed driving time. The watch hands and numbers were treated with an irradiant to glow in the dark for nighttime driving. All very special and "high tech" too!

These watches were first introduced in 1954 by the Chrysler Corporation and were offered during that year in five versions. The first and most common was the Moparmatic for use in any Chrysler Corporation vehicle. Other versions followed: the Chryslermatic, Desotomatic, Dodgematic and the Plymouthmatic. The subject Plymouthmatic with the illustrated retainer will fit the Plymouth years 1953 through 1956.

The most rare is likely the Dodgematic as it will only fit the 1953-54 Dodge years and was therefore produced in a limited quantity. The second most uncommon is the Plymouthmatic which is likely the



result of economics. At \$49.95 it was pitched for its precision, accuracy, and beauty; all true, but it was a very expensive option. For example, our Plymouth convertible sold new for a base price of \$2,600 and the entire heater defroster option was available for \$75. Also, an attractive electric dash top-mounting clock was offered for \$20.65; that's less than half the cost of a steering wheel watch.

Perhaps the greatest limiting factor to the popularity of these watches was the fact that they were very impractical! They were likely impossible to read at night in spite of the radium treatment, or anytime while you were turning the wheel, and certainly somewhat of a challenge when the steering wheel was not aligned in the straight forward steering position. However, aren't they the coolest accessory you have ever seen? I believe they are the most exciting automotive gizmo ever!

The Chrysler Corporation was not the first automotive manufacturer to offer the self-winding steering wheel clocks but they were the most successful over time as they continued to offer versions of these watches through 1959. The cost remained at \$50 and sales were never brisk. Benrus also offered some late models directly to the consumer and likely produced more than demand warranted at the time. Regardless, it is rare indeed to find one of these unique watches for sale today.

If you are interested in more information, the guru of the many versions of these unique and fabulous watches is Lee Exline who maintains a detailed and comprehensive website regarding the many interesting versions of these watches at <http://www.roadkillontheweb.com/clocks.html>.

PURPOSE OF THE SUNSHINE CLUB

By Linda Grundy, Chairperson of the Sunshine Club

The Sunshine Club has been formed to put a ray of sunshine in a Club member's corner when that member is going through a difficult time. It is a way for the Club to acknowledge and offer support in a time of need without being intrusive.

Often Club members are unaware that another member is facing a surgery or loss. It is, of course, their prerogative not to share that information with the Club. However, should a friend or relative feel the Club member would appreciate a "dose of sunshine," all they need do is contact the Sunshine Chairperson. The Chairperson will send either a card or flowers from the VLNAAC, and relay the information to all Club members so that they may follow up individually if they wish.

The Chairperson will also compile a list of volunteers who will be willing to prepare food to assist a member's family in extreme cases where the family agrees it would be helpful.

The occasions precipitating the above would be a serious illness requiring hospitalization, a death in the immediate family, or an injury requiring long-term rehabilitation or convalescence.

Should any Club member be aware of another member in need of a "dose of sunshine," please call me at 457-3526.

BY-LAWS TO BE REVIEWED

The proposed changes to our by-laws that you received in the March newsletter will be discussed at our April membership meeting. Some members who attended the March meeting were concerned that they would not have the opportunity to provide their input. All were assured that the proposed changes were suggestions to improve the clarity in the administration of club matters and that the membership will have the opportunity to review all proposed changes, provide additional suggestions and then vote on the final proposed version. Scott Grundy has agreed to coordinate the effort and requests that you call him to discuss any additional inputs you may have (grundy@mosquitonet.com, 457-3526). Doing so beforehand will enable Scott to develop a written list of suggestions to expedite discussion at the meeting. The objective is to accomplish the review process and adopt a proposed final draft at this meeting. A substantial portion of this meeting will be allotted to this effort. Please bring your copy of the by-laws that were provided to you.

RAFFLE CAR PROGRESS

By Ron Allen

The 1960 Falcon two-door wagon raffle car has been



Scott and Ray put some finishing touches on the new front seat cover.



Above, John McFaul positions the new headliner. This became a rather tricky and labor intensive effort requiring windows to be removed. Below, Scott and Sam intently listen to John's presentation about the headliner.



Charley Jurgens welds in a repair panel on the floorboard.

providing weekend entertainment for club members electing to assist and learn some new restoration tricks at the same time. The floor pans have been repaired and preserved to get ready for new carpet. New carpet, door panels and headliner have been received. John McFaul, an automotive painter by trade and former upholsterer provided a headliner workshop for members while installing the new headliner on March 16. Thank you John for your excellent work and presentation. Also thank you to the Jurgens for donating time and space for workshop and for the generous donations of food, drinks and deserts. Raffle tickets may be checked out or purchased from Willy Vinton or Ron Allen.

TROLL DOLL GOES MISSING AGAIN!

At the February general membership meeting Rick Larrick was entrusted with the safekeeping of the club's mascot, a tiny Girl Troll Doll. The doll was missing before the end of the meeting. Rick was desparate to find her and even offered a reward for information leading to her location. Fortunately the doll did turn up for the March meeting, but Rick is not off the hook. There was something about the doll that no one had ever noticed before. A baby troll doll was accompanying the Girl Troll doll. Rick failed his entrusted responsibility absolutely miserably. Club President Willy assigned another supposedly responsible member, a long-time pillar of the community, Roy Wilbur to guard the troll doll and its baby until the April meeting. Roy smuggly placed the doll for safekeeping in his shirt pocket with only its head showing, knowing that there was no way anyone could kidnap the doll from him. Roy was absolutely devastated when he found at the end of the meeting that the doll was no longer in his shirt pocket and nowhere to be found. Roy! Roy! Roy! Who can we depend on?

LAST MONTH'S MYSTERY ALASKAN PHOTO

By Ron Allen - Photo and information were provided by Squeeky Benham



I received no responses or guesses about the historic mystery photo reprinted above. The photo was taken in 1939 at the Boundry Roadhouse, which was opened that same year by George and Dorothy King. Boundry had substantial mining activity at the time including dredging operations. One of the men on motorcycles is Slim Williams, a local miner, prospector, dog musher and promoter. Slim Williams was promoting the development of a northwest highway to open up Alaska for development. Slim had already driven a dog sled to Seattle using crude maps in 1934 and went on to the Chicago World's Fair and Washington DC where he met dignitaries including President Roosevelt in his promotional endeavours. In 1939 as depicted in the photo, Slim and a companion drove motorcycles from Fairbanks to Seattle in their promotional attempts. Squeeky speculated about the routing of this trip. He believes that they took the Richardson-Valdez trail to Rikka's Roadhouse in Delta where they could catch a boat upriver to the Tanana Crossing. From there they could use the Eagle trail to Boundry. There was a cat trail between Boundry and Dawson City. From Dawson City they could use a boat to get to Whitehorse. From Whitehorse there were Overland Telegraph trails they could follow to Prince Rupert. From Prince Rupert there were railroads and trails they could follow to Seattle. They built rafts to cross rivers and probably encountered all sorts of difficulties. According to Wikipedia, Slim said he never missed a meal, but sometimes he got a few days behind. Squeeky says one of the bikes used on this trip is at the UAF Museum. Although Slim was unable to get a road built at that time, World War 2 soon ushered in a transportation need that did result in the Alcan Highway being built.

Do you have a mystery photo or item you would like to share? If so, contact Ron Allen.

SUMMER SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

Provided by Rochelle Larson

Tentative Schedule of Events

- Now to June 1 at 3:00 PM: Raffle Sales
- June 7: Car Show at Ft Wainwright
- May 31, June 1: Car Show Carlson Center
- June 4, August 27: Wednesday Night Runarounds. Roy and Brenda Weaver are coordinating these again this year.

- June 14: Poker Run to Chena Hot Springs (Nash Cabin)
- June 15: Sourdough Fuel Father's Day Car Show
- June 21: Solstice Show and Shine
- June 29: Car Rally (Gary Nash)
- July 4: North Pole Parade 4th of July
- July 12: Car Club Picnic at Domke's
- July 19: Golden Days Parade
- August 7: Meeting at Salmon Bake
- August 8, 9, 10: Joint Meet with Anchorage Car Club at Majestic Mountain
- September 6 or 13: Poker Run Chatanika Lodge

Other Possible Events

- Once a Month: Run Around to North Pole (Bill Wright)
- June 21: Rootbeer Float Stand at the Solstice Event.
- July 1: Canada Day at Dawson City
- July 4: Eagle 4th of July Celebration
- July 26: Delta Fair
- August 4-11: Hot August Nights at Reno, NV



BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

APRIL BIRTHDAYS

01 Joni Ellsworth
 03 Roy Wilbur
 04 Larry Bennett
 07 Rudy Domke
 07 Mel Brabham
 10 Mark Cosson
 12 Julio Merced
 13 Greg Shoemaker
 13 Bryana Angulo
 14 Ron Frey
 14 Nancy Peterson
 15 Wilma Vinton
 18 Jim Cornell
 20 Ken Uzzell
 24 Don Oines
 26 Betty Borg
 26 Doris Casey
 26 Loren "Bud" Rotroff
 27 Marion Benham

APRIL ANNIVERSARIES

06 Benjamin & Stella
 Carpenter
 11 Herman & Penny Hauck
 28 David & Celeste Reid



CLASSIFIED ADS

Model "A" Repairs: Bill Wright, an active VLNAACF club member, does re-babbitt work on A's, B's, and T's, complete engine rebuilds, and carburetor, oil pump and water pump rebuilds. Call him at 479-8506 or his cell phone 388-2118.

Welding, Repair and Fabrication! Need it done? I can do it! Tom (Blue) Hinchliff 479-0478.

OFFICERS:

VLNAAC Website: oldcarsfairbanks.org

President	Willy Vinton	wvinton@acsalaska.net	907-456-2261
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Director	Gary Nash		907-456-2103
Director	Ray Mcleod	rmcleod@gci.net	907-456-7877
Director	Scott Grundy	grundy@mosquitonet.com	907-457-3526
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Events Coordinator	Rochelle Larson	Rochelle1987@hotmail.com	907-456-6736
Acting Membership Chair	Rick Larrick	crlarrick@alaska.net	907-457-4344

NEXT MEETINGS

The next general club meeting is Thursday, April 10 at the **Roundup Steakhouse** on South Cushman. Dinner starts at 6:00 PM and the meeting is at 7:00.

The Board Meeting is at 6:30 PM at the **Siam Square** at 59 College across from Sam's Club on Tuesday April 8. Everyone is also welcome to attend Board Meetings.

Newsletter Deadline

All materials for the newsletter should be in by the 20th of the month to be considered for the next newsletter. Email ronandnancy@gci.net or call 907-488-3965. Items can be mailed to Ron at his home address; 1288 Rangeview Dr, North Pole, AK 99705.

Have a story about how you got your car? A favorite trip? A real repair hassle? Send it in!



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