



DASHING...JUST DASHING!

The average Model A has quite a bit of art built in, and Wheeler's Speed Shop found a way to make it work with new components

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The Model A marked a milestone for Ford; it represented the first *all-new* design to roll off the lines in 20 years. A transitional piece, the '28 retained much of the T's charm, yet it invoked the image of the Lincoln—albeit in cut-down form.

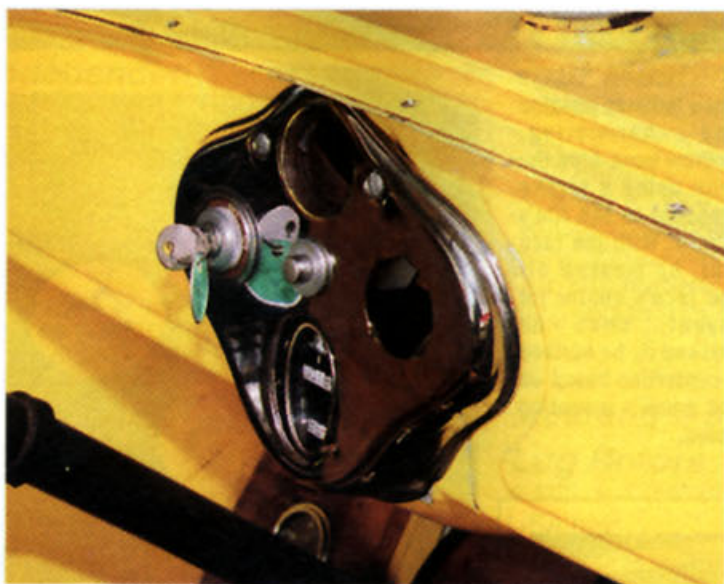
Its dash reflected that design ethos: a pretty little nickel-dipped binnacle screwed directly to the tank's backside (remember, the A's fuel tank constituted its cowl and dashpanel) right smack-dab at cockpit center. It mounted five essential elements: a speedometer, ammeter, and fuel level gauge, plus an ignition and starter switch.

Unfortunately, those five essential elements don't cut the mustard when building a car for today's traffic: Model A speedometers only read up to about 70 or so and their ammeters measure 20-amp loads. Oil pressure? What oil pressure? In most cases many builders have opted to carve out the poor tank and hide it with a flat panel in

the mad rush to mount a "proper" dashpanel to house contemporary gauges.

Thankfully in this case, that wouldn't do. One of Wheeler's Speed Shop's customers, Jerry Cole, kinda liked the way that Spartan dash looked in his roadster pickup and asked if they could find a way to use it. Hot for a challenge, Bryan Wheeler and fabricator Andrew McClelland mapped out what they could do with the display. After a cut here and plug there, they found they could mount quite a bit in that dash. They found room for a speedometer, an oil pressure gauge, a voltmeter, and a temperature gauge—all AutoMeter to be exact. Since the dash was to go back to the plater's, they TIG welded the piece back together and hand-filed everything perfect.

Since we know you like that kind of stuff as much as we do, we followed Andrew as he made the changes. Take your time with it, and yours could take on a new shine, too.



Here's a '28 to early-'30 dash in stock form, yet missing its ammeter and fuel gauge. The late-'30/early-'31 looks similar, but is wider. The same procedure applies to that setup, though.



Andrew started by removing the ignition switch and speedometer mounting brackets. Ford simply swedged the cluster's face over the brackets to retain them, so Andrew filed the foiled material away with a high-speed steel rotary file.



With the light switch removed, all that remained was a gaping hole from the starter switch. Andrew filled that with a sheetmetal plug from one of Ron Covell's plug kits. There's only one problem: the plug is just a smidge larger than the hole.



So Andrew cut the hole larger with a stepped sheetmetal bit. It cuts a near-perfect circle that's great for no-gap welding.

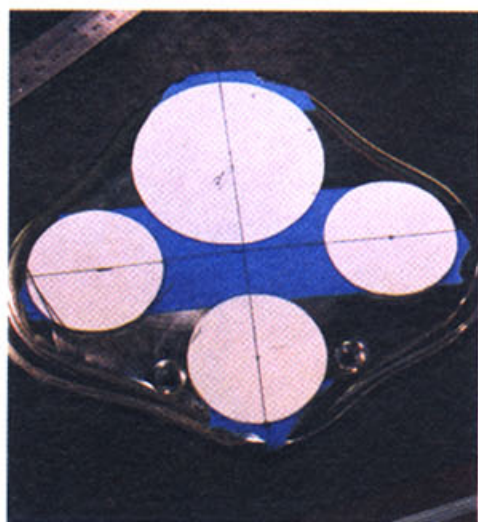


Andrew didn't just buzz the plug in place in one fell swoop, though. To keep the plug and panel absolutely flat, he tacked an area, hammered it flat, and tacked yet another until he'd fully welded the plug in place.





Once finished welding and hammering, Andrew hand-filed the face using a stroke diagonal to the file's length. With the face flat, he masked off the face's center for layout. Once he masked it, he scribed a centerline based on the panel's mounting holes.



Andrew simulated the gauges with paper templates cut to the gauges' can diameter. Note: remember not to cut the holes to the bezels' gross outside diameter; the gauges will just fall through the holes! He used the templates for alignment and to mark gauge centerlines, then he scribed the holes' dimensions based on the gauge can diameters.

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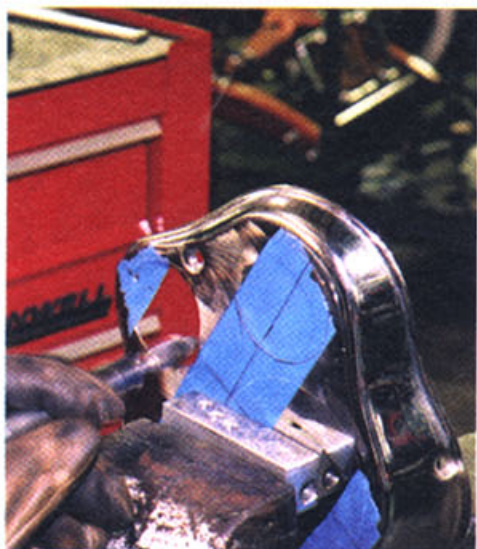
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With holes scribed, Andrew broke out the trusty rotary file and pneumatic reciprocating saw. Here's the trick thing: he needed only to enlarge existing holes. →

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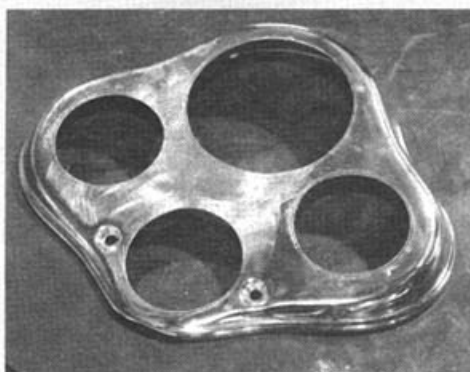
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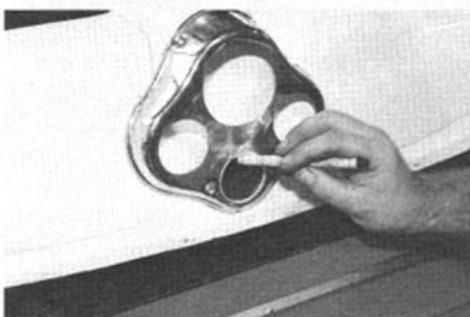
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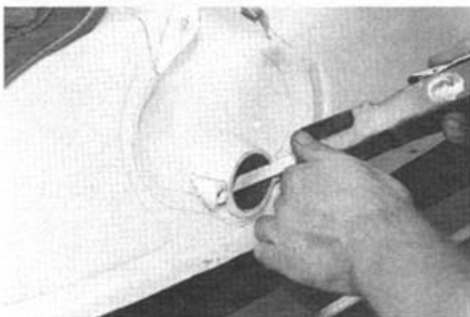
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With the panel trimmed, the gauges looked as if they belonged in the holes. All gauge radii matched the dash's outside dimensions to a tee (or an A in this case).

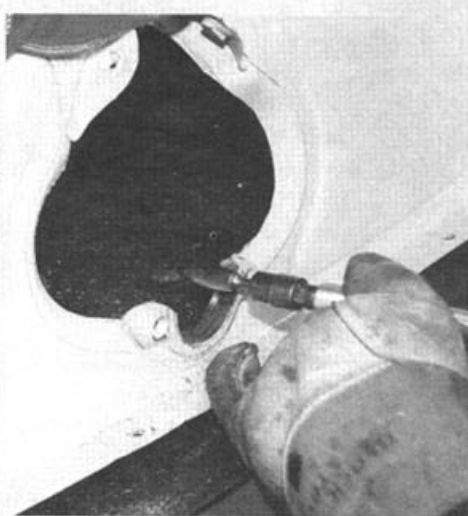


While the panel requires the majority of technical prowess, the tank still requires some heavy finesse. Andrew said he wanted to retain the cast-iron boss soldered to the tank, as it mounts the panel solid. He started by scribing a line on the iron boss based on the panel's dimensions.

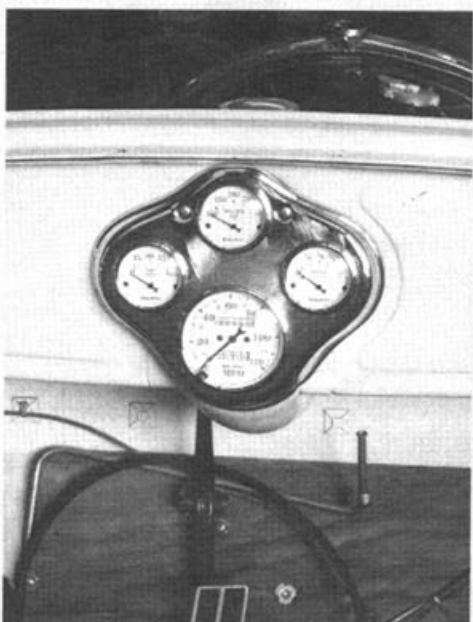



It's a time- and blade-consuming ordeal, but the pneumatic saw nibbles through the iron in due time. Remember to leave as much boss-to-tank material as possible; the panel's integrity relies on it.

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Actually, Andrew didn't cut the exact shape into the iron. He cut a straight line close to it, as the blade's breadth wouldn't allow curved cuts. To get the shape exact, he worked the iron with the rotary file. Here's a tip when it comes to rotary filing iron: slow surface cutting speed—on the order of 4,000 to 6,000 rpm. Spin the bit fast and it'll cut slowly, chatter, and destroy itself.



And here's the end result. The procedure took the better part of a day for a pro (we'd give our amateur sensibilities a bit longer), but there's nothing saying careful amateur hands couldn't perform this mod. The AutoMeter white vintage-series gauges look right at home now, and best of all, they work perfectly while showing off that neat insert. 

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