

Learning to drive country style

By Vic Groah

In rural Oregon a driver's license could be had on your 14th birthday if you lived in the country and there was no school bus route to your area. My circumstances fit both of these. Like most farm kids I had been plowing and disking for some time so driving a tractor was old hat. The rules of the road had to be learned but the state driver's manual told you all that stuff. Father had nooo patience to teach me to drive; mother would take some time but not much. I was pretty much on my own. I had a Cushman scooter that was purchased for a princely sum of \$20 that I drove to work. The police pretty much ignored us kids on our scooters. They knew we needed them to go to work on the farms.

Somewhere father had come up with a 1944 Crosley panel truck. Yes they did not build cars in 1944 but there were some military vehicles built and this one was made for navy use. It had a two cylinder Waukesha engine with 13 horse power. It would putt along at a scalding 35 miles per hour and run, seemingly forever on a gallon of gas. Father let me use this mighty machine to self teach driving. Mother would set up a pair of buckets about the length of a car and I would practice parallel parking. The panel had no rear windows or mirrors so I had to learn to estimate the distance. With some practice I got very good at parking and all the rest of the stuff was just common sense and knowing the driving rules. On practice drives in town the local small town police looked the other way. I certainly was not speeding in the Crosley and had been seen in town for a couple of years on the Cushman. I borrowed mother's 1942 Chevrolet to take the state test and got a perfect score. The best was parking. I just whipped that Chevrolet into the space like a pro. Unlike with the Crosley I could actually see out back and it had mirrors.

To my great sorrow when I passed the test father destroyed the sweet and very rare little panel truck. I was angry at that but was to find the next several of my own cars fell to the same fate. I bought a 1932 Chevrolet for \$5 to drive, it soon met father's cutting torch. If I was thought to be out of line for something he would destroy my car as a lesson to not mess up; lost five cars that way through my high school years. I must have been a slow learner.

I received my license on my 14th birthday. I was promptly promoted to field boss in charge of a crew at the corporate farm where I worked and was issued a company pickup. By the age of 15 I was driving a company truck hauling hops. Those indeed were different times.