

Mr. Flathead Again!

by Tom Endy

By now most people have heard about Flathead Ted's brake system floaters. Flathead's real name is Ted Spain and he hails from New Zealand. The floater system is a significant improvement to the stock Model A mechanical brake system, if it is installed correctly.

Two articles have appeared in Model A Times detailing the installation process. It is recommended that copies be acquired before attempting an installation. The two publications are Fall 2006 and Winter 2007. It is also necessary to have some type of a centering tool in order to center the rear brakes. Bratton Antique Auto offers an excellent tool, part number 2695 (\$44.00).

Ted's floater system is somewhat pricey, but keep in mind the price includes some excellent engineering efforts. The parts are also very well made. It is not surprising that imitations are starting to appear at a lesser price. To be sure you are getting the genuine article I suggest you order them direct from Ted. You can contact him by e-mail, give him a credit card number, and you will have them in less than ten days. Ted's e-mail is tedspain@gmail.com.

It should be kept in mind that Ted's floater system is not a cure all for a worn out brake system. For the floaters to be affective the brake system should be in reasonably good condition. Worn out shoes and turned out drums should be replaced. It is also important that the drums are round and the shoes be arced to match the circumference of the drum.

A word of caution, there are some Model A suppliers who are selling a brake spring set that is incorrect for a Model A. Besides being too strong, the hooks at each end are oriented incorrectly. The overly strong springs will tend to pull the shoes sideways and also cause the brake adjusting shafts, Ford part number A-2042 to hang up inside the shaft holes. When the floaters are installed it is important that the adjusting shafts slide freely in their holes. The brake spring set sold by Bratton is correct for a Model A.

An important aspect of the installation that is not documented anywhere pertains to the condition of the A-2042 brake adjusting shafts. The shafts may not necessarily be round; in fact some have a seam running their length. The shafts were not originally intended to move. Once a brake adjustment was made they remained in a static position. The brake floater kit requires that they move back and forth as the shoes float and center themselves. For this reason it is important that the shafts be round, smooth, and not bent. It is best to examine them closely and smooth them with a file. They should also be well lubricated.

A more recent addition to the floater kits are parts that Ted refers to as "pins". The pins are used only on the rear brakes, and take the place of the roller pins that ride on the roller tracks. The pins are a four-sided cam that centers the shoes. This is where you need the Bratton centering tool. The kit includes four pins, two for each rear wheel. It is important to note that each pair is a mirror image. It is therefore important to inspect them closely and determine which is a pair.

It is also best to place a piece of tape on the backsides of the pins and mark them with the number of each side (1, 2, 3, and 4). When centering the shoes you have to decide which numbered side will center the shoes. It is a trial and error effort. Both pins in a given wheel should be installed using the same number. When installing the shoes you cannot see the numbers on the backside and it is easy for them to rotate out of position while trying to install the shoes. A trick is to note the orientation of the cotter pin that you can see on the front and use that as a reference.

Flathead Ted recommends that after the floater kit is installed the brakes should be adjusted so the front brakes come in slightly ahead of the rear brakes. ☺