

Henry's Anti-theft System

by Tom Endy

Horse thieves and car thieves have one thing in common, they have to be quick about it. If the project is going to take some time they will move on to a better prospect. Henry came up with a unique anti-theft system for the Model A. Though it is not fool proof, it is time consuming, and it is thus not that easy to hot wire a Model A Ford.

The ignition system on a Model A is very simple. Battery power is applied directly to one side of the primary of the coil through a black wire attached to one of the wing nut terminals on the firewall. The red wire from the other primary side of the coil sneaks its way into the terminal block opposite the black wire, but is not connected to anything inside. Instead the wire runs up to the dash panel and connects directly to the ignition key switch.

When the key is switched off (the pop-out pushed in) there is no electrical connection made to the coil. In addition the arm side of the switch is connected direct to ground when switched to the off position. The ground prevents someone from going inside the distributor and successfully connecting a hot wire because the points will have a ground on them and the hot wire will not work.

A wire is connected to the arm side of the ignition switch and runs down through an armored cable to the distributor delivering battery voltage to the ignition points. The cable is very tough and there is no way you can cut through it with a hack saw. On the end of the armored cable is a threaded coupler that screws into the distributor housing. In order to thread (or unthread) the connector, the distributor has to be removed from the engine. And before you can do that you have to unbolt the head bolt nut clamping the cable to the number 8 stud.

The only way you can hot wire a Model A is to unbolt the clamp from the number 8 stud, unbolt the locking nut on the side of the head, remove the distributor from the head and while holding it in your hands, unscrew the distributor from the armored cable. Some type of wiring device would then have to be inserted inside connector boss of the distributor to make electrical contact and have a length of wire attached with a clip lead on it.

The distributor would then have to be reinstalled in the head and the clip lead attached to the low side of the primary of the coil after the existing wire has been removed. All this will take some amount of time, providing you have the right tools with you and know which is the low side of the coil.

There is, however, a down side to Henry's anti-theft system. It has a tendency to fail now and then and leave you stranded unable to start the car. The wire inside the armored cable can become disconnected or short out. The switch itself can become defective and lose the connection, or short out. In many cases the malfunction is intermittent and it is difficult to determine what is causing the problem.

This is where an ignition bypass cable comes in handy. It is the same device a thief would use if he wanted to hot wire and steal the car and had plenty of time to do it. The cable is made up from a discarded pop-out cable. What is needed is the connector portion that screws into the distributor. A wire with a clip lead is attached to the other end.

When a pop-out cable or ignition switch failure is suspected. Remove the existing cable as previously described and screw the bypass cable into the distributor and attach the clip lead to the coil. The car should then start. In order to shut the engine off you have to remove the clip lead.

Most modern day Model A hobbyist who do a lot of touring carry a bypass cable and do not connect the armored cable to the number 8 stud. The clamp is discarded and a spacer is put under the number 8 nut to compensate for the longer stud. Removing a head bolt nut while out on the road is not a good idea. It can allow the head to warp and dump water into the oil pan.



Ignition bypass cable