

POOR QUALITY PARTS

It happened to me; I had to have my Model A towed home. I was driving down the freeway thru East Los Angeles while returning from a recent outing with the Santa Anita A's. I shifted the Mitchell Overdrive into direct, let out the clutch and suddenly realized that the engine was no longer connected to the rest of the drive train. Luckily, there was an exit just ahead and I was able to steer my powerless Model A down the off ramp and over to the side of the road. Twenty minutes after a call to the Auto Club, the flat bed truck arrived to take my stricken car home.

The next day I did a little diagnosis. With the engine running, the transmission in gear and overdrive in direct, when the clutch was engaged the car should have moved, but it would not. I noticed the speedometer did not register so that led me to believe the driveshaft was not turning. This meant the problem was between the flywheel and the point on the drive shaft where the speedometer gear is attached. After removing the floorboards and clutch inspection cover, I looked very closely at what I could see of the clutch disc and saw where the disc had come apart and the center springs were missing. Well only one thing to do, replace the clutch.

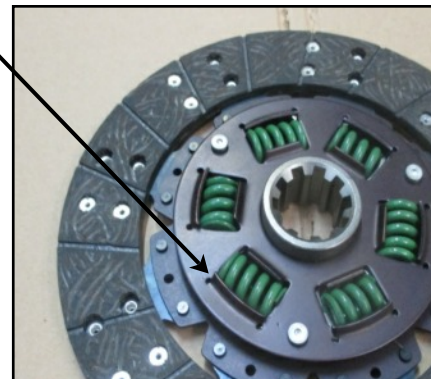
After removing the clutch, I found the disc was in pieces. With just over 12,000 miles on the restoration, the clutch should have still been in good condition. In 2002 when I restored the engine I thought I had purchased the best parts available. For years, I had been using Ft. Wayne Clutch in Indiana to supply clutch components. They were well respected in the industry and I was confident that they supplied only top quality parts. I do remember when I ordered a rebuilt clutch assembly that they supplied new clutch discs and not rebuilt ones. At the time, I did not know these new discs came from China. These were the same clutch discs that for years have been identified with premature failures.

I did some research and found that Bratton's is now having a high quality clutch disc made here in the USA. When I inspected the new disc from Bratton's, I could easily see the difference. The two outside driven plates that retain the center springs are much thicker with tabs formed to better hold the springs in place. The springs themselves are larger and the rivets that hold the driven discs together are much more substantial. The Marcell Springs (the wavy springs between the linings) were better designed with twice as many rivets holding the linings in place. The Bratton disc was obviously a much higher quality product.

A clutch disc should last the life of the engine. It is a lot of work to replace the clutch so buy the best components available. I am just glad this happened where it did and not hundreds of miles away from home while on a tour.

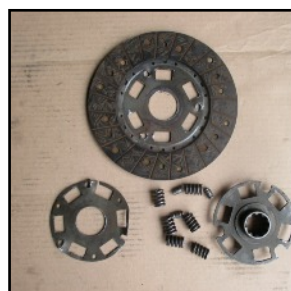
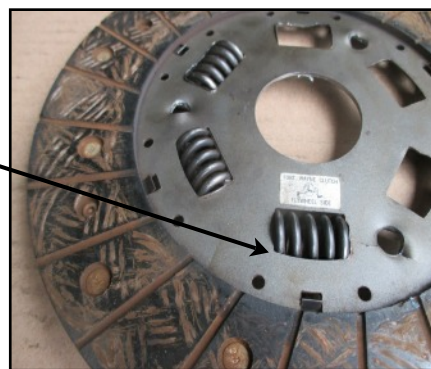
Good clutch design

Note: The plate has spring retainer tabs built into the clutch drive plate.



Bad Clutch design

Note: The plate has no spring retainers tabs built into the clutch drive plate



Disassembled clutch disk

TECH TIP

When replacing the clutch, be sure to also replace the pressure plate assembly if it shows signs of wear. Also, it is a very good idea to always replace the throw out bearing and the pilot bearing. These parts are not expensive but a lot of work to replace at a later date if they should fail.

This also may be a good time to install a replacement "extra long" clutch release lever. This up-grade will make the clutch softer and easier to operate. Extra long clutch release levers are available from most Model A parts suppliers.