

The shocking Truth**All you need to know about the Model A Distributor**

During the past several months working with the Low End Boys, I have discovered that when a club member's Model A needs attention, the problem is often found in the ignition system. The engine is not getting adequate spark to the spark plugs or spark is not occurring at the correct time. Sometimes, the problem can be traced to a fault in the wiring or a bad ignition switch or ammeter, however most often the problem lies with the distributor itself. For those of us who may not be familiar with the Model A distributor, if you open the hood, the distributor is that mysterious thing that sits on the top of the engine with all the wires going to it. Understanding how the Model A distributor works and how to adjust the points and set the timing will go a long way toward being able to perform basic maintenance and keep your Model A in good running order.

When our Model A's were new, distributors were used on most multi-cylinder spark ignition internal combustion engines. The distributor has to perform many functions such as provide a properly timed low voltage electrical signal to the ignition coil and distributing the resultant high voltage current from the coil to the proper spark plug. There must also be some provision where the timing of the signal to the coil can be changed as engine requirements varied such as during starting and changes in load and speed of the engine. Ford designed the Model A distributor to do all of these things.

The Model A distributor is an ingenious little device. It was simple, easy to repair and adjust using simple tools. Ford also incorporated a very simple method to vary the timing when the spark occurs. The Model A distributor functioned well, proved to be very reliable and was essentially unchanged during the entire production of the car. Through the years, the original Model A distributor has been unfairly blamed for functioning poorly and being unreliable. It is true that today, a lot of original distributors are unreliable and do cause problems and some owners feel that it is best to just replace that old worn out original distributor with one of the new "modern" distributors. Modern distributors have problems of their own and are not necessarily the best solution.

The problem we have is that after more than 85 years, most of the original Model A distributors have suffered from poor repair, have been subjected to having poor quality replacement parts used in them, or are just worn out. Also, a lot of owners do not know how to install, maintain and adjust the original Model A distributor.

Today, things are different. Once again, good quality replacement parts are available and we have good information on how to rebuild, install and adjust the Model A distributor.

Before you spend a lot of money on a "modern" distributor, look into getting your original ignition system in good repair with a properly rebuilt original distributor. Once properly rebuilt using good quality parts, the Model A distributor with minimal maintenance will provide many years and miles of reliable service. The original distributor will function very well both for the Model A that is basically original and is mainly used for local touring and parades as well as for those who have a modified engine and use their cars for serious long distance touring.

Only the original Model A distributor, as "Henry" designed it, will allow your Model A to function as originally intended. I find that part of the enjoyment of driving my Model A is to retard the timing while waiting at a stop light and listening to the engine idle very slowly, a-chug-a-chug-a-chug. This is very distinctive Model A and no other car sounds like that. You cannot do that with your "modern" distributor.

Happy motoring in your Model A.

Tech Tip Are you plugged in?

Or better said, "Is the coil wire on your Model A properly plugged into the coil?" On a recent tour to Porterville to the CCRG Jamboree, 2 cars from our club suffered breakdowns, one three times and the other just once, all for the same problem. The high tension coil wire came loose in the coil and started to fall out. In both cases, the coil wire had not been fully seated in the coil and was just sort of being held in place by the rubber boot. With time, the rubber boot became old and could no longer hold the wire in place, the coil wire would start to fall out and the engine would quit running.

There is a very simple fix for this. First of all, Henry never used a rubber boot on either end of the coil wire. The wire itself had a small brass tip that was soldered to the end of the copper conductor in the wire. This brass tip was designed to snap into the coil, securely holding the high tension wire in place. This wire with the brass tips soldered in place is available from most parts suppliers for less than \$2.00 or you can make your own. Just be sure you solder the brass tips or one may come loose and get stuck in the coil. A special coil wire without a solid conductor may be necessary if an electronic ignition is being used. This special wire is available for less than \$4.00. Just be sure the coil wire securely snaps in place and do not depend on a boot to keep it from falling out.

