

MY SOUTH AFRICAN ANTIQUE AUTOMOBILE ADVENTURES

By Robert Palumbo and Eric Edwards



Thanks to two of our international readers for this refreshing perspective that reminds us just how wonderful this part of the world and the people who live here are! And yes, they use fires and not tyres!

One day your life will flash before your eyes. Make sure it's worth watching.

Gerald Way - Born in 1977 is an American singer, songwriter and comic book writer.

In 2023 Eric Edwards and I returned to South Africa for another great adventure. We travelled primarily in the Western Cape, which is situated on the south-western tip of the African continent. It's a region of folded mountains, well-watered valleys, wide beaches and breathtaking scenery. The cold Atlantic Ocean along the west coast is a rich fishing area, while the warmer Indian Ocean skirts its southern beaches.

This journey turned out to be a multisensory experience. We were introduced to great local cuisine, stayed in unusual and exceptional places, visited unique attractions, met wonderful people and made new friends. Immersing ourselves in the local culture opened my eyes to a world I didn't know it existed.

The highlight of this trip was a 1000 kilometers adventure in Eric's 1911 Ford Model T Open Runabout. This may not seem unusual however an Open Runabout is nothing more than a horse drawn buggy without the horse. The automobile is, as its name states, 'open' and while traveling at 60 kilometers per hour, you need to hang on for dear life. This became most evident while crossing the mountain ranges in the area.

The Western Cape is littered with mountain ranges and of course we had to cross several

during the excursion. One such crossing was the Du Toitskloof Pass which climbs 820 meters. The pass is located near the 1995-meter Du Toits' Peak which is one of the highest mountains in the area.

We had been on the road for three days and it was time for me to take over and give Eric a break from driving. I'm not certain why Eric chose the top of the Du Toitskloof Pass for me to get my feet wet driving the T but, not wanting to seem timid, I eagerly agreed to take my turn. After all, how hard could it be, It was all

downhill from here.

The road we were on was wide, with steep, vertical rock walls on the left and a sheer drop on the right. With virtually no traffic coming up the pass, it was going to be easy, or so I thought. Shortly after I began driving the vehicle suddenly began to pick up speed. I quickly pressed the third pedal on the right applying the brake and the speed was somewhat reduced. We were traveling at about forty kilometers per hour although on a downgrade it seemed a lot faster. At this point I pulled back on the lever



The 1911 Ford Runabout takes on the Western Cape

➔ PTO



Abdul Rahaman and his wife who came to our rescue



Thin walled tyre plus thorn equals trouble

located on my right which would activate the rear wheel brakes and there was little evidence of the vehicle slowing down. Our speed was only increasing. I began to zig zag from one side of the road to the other with the hope of slowing down. This too proved unsuccessful. We had now only two options, crash against the solid rock wall or go over the edge plummeting to our death.

I don't recall being afraid in that moment, there wasn't any time to think. Having Eric besides me gave me the reassurance that everything would be ok and it wasn't until we stopped that I began to see my life flash quickly before my eyes. I was thankful to be alive and having had

this latest adventure to add to my list of accomplishments.

Eric had saved the day. He quickly began to yell instructions. Try the foot pedal brake, pull back



The car (or was it Eric) gained admirers wherever they stopped

on the rear wheel emergency brake lever and at the same time engage reverse. This maneuver worked and the automobile came to a smoky stop.

Newton's second law of motion. The force on an object is equal to its mass times its acceleration. Isaac Newton 1642-1727 English mathematician, physicist, astronomer, alchemist and theologian.

Of course that wasn't our only misadventure in the Runabout. It was getting late, and the sun was close to calling it a day. We were on the N2 highway, approaching Cape Town and it had been a long day. For the most part of our journey and in the interest of safety, Eric drove as close to the left-hand side, practically in the emergency lane. Regular automotive traffic maintained the 100-kilometer speed limit and would pass us as if we were standing still. Eric and I were cruising at the neck breaking speed of 65 kilometers per hour. This may not seem like much, however traveling in an antique open automobile, it felt like we were flying.

Suddenly, seeing the highway exit, Eric quickly steered to the right and began to go up the exit ramp only to realize that it was not our exit. After fifty meters or so, he came to a complete stop. "This is not where we should be, we'll just back up and get back on the highway again" was Eric's solution to the error, and so he did. Not wanting to back up the full length of the exit, Eric cut across the grasses median, which placed us back on the highway.

Minutes later we were at top speed again when, suddenly, the unthinkable happened. From the corner of my left eye I saw the rear

tire passing us going faster than the car and picking up speed. "Keep your eye on it and see where it's going" was Eric's instruction in a cool voice. Seconds later the white rubber tire came to a gentle stop not far ahead. We stopped to check for damage and see what had happened.

Well, it was all Newton's fault. He invented this law relating an object's motion to the force acting on it. We had had a puncture, the heavy tire deflating and the speed we were traveling caused the tire and inner tube to come off the steel rim and zoom past us.

Eric's driving skill had avoided losing control of the vehicle, averting a major catastrophe. He didn't bat an eye, "not to worry, we have a spare tube, and I can fix it". He then remembered another little detail, "the air compressor I have will only pump air to 35 psi, we need at least 50 pounds pressure to inflate the tires". As if the situation wasn't bad enough, minutes later the front left tire also went flat right before our eyes.

We had two spare inner tubes, and the flats could be repaired but how were we going to inflate the tires? It was about seven in the evening and the sun was beginning to set. There would be little daylight to work by. Luckily, we did have powerful highway lighting that would help illuminate our repair work.

Oh, I almost forgot, the Gods added one other obstacle in our path. Suddenly the highway fell into complete darkness. This, being South Africa, we had discovered - another little known tourist attraction, 'Load Shedding'. (This practice is the deliberate and systematic shutdown of electric power in part of the power distribution system, supposedly when the demand strains the capacity of the system). It would have been very romantic, if only we were having dinner in some cozy little Cape Town restaurant.

We now needed a miracle.

A sporty, white antique automobile with red wire wheels on the shoulder of a highway does not go unnoticed and we did attract a lot of attention from the speeding motorists. Minutes after we stopped, a young couple in a large van stopped behind us to see what the matter was. The man asked if he could help, and we explained our predicament. Eric engaged in a

light conversation, as he does and, in a matter of minutes, we discovered that the couple were both students. He was studying pharmacy, and she was in medicine. The man proceeded to tell us how he did auto body work to supplement his income while studying and Eric responded with an account of his antique automobile restoration business. All I could think of was how we were parked, dangerously on the side of the highway, in the DARK.

The couple volunteered to go to their home and get a portable compressor while Eric started to replace the inner tubes. Luckily, I had purchased a mini flashlight and the strobe light warned the oncoming traffic of our presence on the side of the road.

Dismantling the tires, it soon became evident that they had been punctured by large thorns. Apparently, the grassed median we had crossed was covered by vines. We later learned that they were a noxious weed that had long, sharp, strong spines which could easily penetrate surfaces such as thin shoes and rubber tires. The vine was known locally as the Devil's Thorn.

Our 'Good Samaritan' couple returned a little while later. The new inner tubes were inflated. Tired and weary, we reached Cape Town by about ten o'clock that

night, followed by the young couple. They had not only given us the compressor to keep, but they also followed us to our hotel, ensuring our safe arrival.

I will never forget that helpful couple that saved the day by their kindness and giving unselfishly of their time. We met many other lovely people during this trip, a testament to the gentleness, generous and cheerful nature of South Africans - no matter their station in life, color or religion.

Growing old is mandatory, growing up is optional.
Walt Disney

One excellent example of the South African hospitality was the Lourens family: Albert, his wife Comien, their children Verushka and Eugene and Kurt, Verushka's husband. The Lourens are friends of Eric and they opened their home to us during our drive through Heidelberg. Albert is a master upholsterer and I greatly admired his craftsmanship particularly his leather automotive work.

Eric and I spent several days with the Lourens' and were treated to traveling the countryside in the back of their 1969 Holden station wagon. We visited places like Witsand and went fishing and later the Bartolomeu Dias Museum, located at Mossel Bay.



With the Lourens family in Heidelberg

It is amazing how the sense of smell can propel you to a different dimension. On one of our first trips in the Holden, I was struck by the smell of the automobile. It was the same as I remembered from the back of my father's 1956 Chevrolet. When I first sat in the Holden, I was suddenly propelled back in time to when I was twelve years old

sitting, in the back of the Chevy with my brother Lou. Sixty years later, I was sitting in the back of an old station wagon with my best friend Eric and feeling twelve years old all over again.

How cool is that.

It's a marvelous feeling realizing that you have never grown up. 🌀

WORLDWIDE INTEREST IN SOUTH AFRICA'S BARN FIND AUCTION

Supplied by Roger Houghton

The recent auction of a barn find in the Eastern Cape of more than 150 old cars attracted in excess of 1 500 bidders, according to an article in Die Burger. The auction took place over 10 days and bidding heated up as the days went by. A total of 2 958 bids were received.

The auctioneers, Creative Rides, devised a special digital app for bidders and it was downloaded by 11 000 potential participants. As many as 30 bids a second were made during the last 15 minutes of the auction. Bids came from countries as far afield as Iran, Indonesia, and Russia, besides the expected interest



from American, German, and British collectors.

These cars were only a portion of the collection of 600-odd collected by Oom Louis Coetzer

and stored in various barns and warehouses. The discovery was only made when preparations were underway to sell portions of land owned by Coetzer and a barn door

was opened. The collection was made up mainly of cars that were in everyday use during in the 1960s and '70s and were not scarce exotics.

Louis and his wife died in a car crash in 2020 and the discovery of cars that had been parked on a farm in Barkly East for more than 40 years was made only a year later.

A Mercedes-Benz 220 SE Fintail from the 1960s was eventually the car that fetched the highest price of R101 000. Some other prices were R81 750 for a GMC truck, R85 750 for a Chevrolet Impala and R61 750 for a Chevy Nova convertible. 🌀