

# A Ford Flathead Engine Swap, Frought With Issues

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In 1961, while Anne Marie and I were living in Linthicum Heights, I was working at Westinghouse as a production tester. One of my co-workers was a guy named George Fogle, and he had courted and married a secretary who owned a 1953 Pontiac. After they were married, George decided they couldn't afford to keep two cars, so he offered to sell the Pontiac to me for \$25 (I don't think he wanted to let her out of his sight!) The Pontiac was a dark green two-door sedan with automatic transmission and six cylinder engine. I couldn't turn down the Pontiac for \$25, even though we didn't really need another car (We had all those great Fords, after all!) To my surprise, it was a nice car, it was quiet, smooth riding, and reliable, obviously, not my kind of car.

Another of my co-workers was Jesse Petit, a veteran of the U.S. Navy, where he received his education in electronics maintenance. He was raised in West Virginia, and was a slow talking amiable fellow; six foot two, broad shouldered. He knew some martial arts stuff, and was not the kind of guy you would want to pick a fight with. Jesse and his wife lived in Mount Airy, in an old house built on the side of a hill. I think if you tripped in the front yard, you would have a good walk to get back where you fell. I guess that Jesse felt like he was back in West Virginia.

I remember one cold winter day, I was walking out of the Westinghouse plant with Jesse, and I noticed a lump in the hood of the '50 Ford he was driving. I asked him what happened to his car to make a dent from the inside out. He said it was bitter cold in Mount Airy that morning, and the Ford wouldn't turn over fast enough to start. Jesse gathered some wood, built a fire under the oil pan to warm it up. After a while, the vapors in the crankcase ignited, blowing the oil breather cap into the hood. He said "After that, the car started!" I guess you can't argue with success.

Jesse said he had a '41 Ford two-door sedan that he had bought from an elderly woman in Mount Airy, but he was afraid to drive it because it had a knock in the engine. My ears perked up and I said "Are you willing to trade it for a '53 Pontiac?" Jesse said "Sure!" We agreed on a time and day to make the swap.

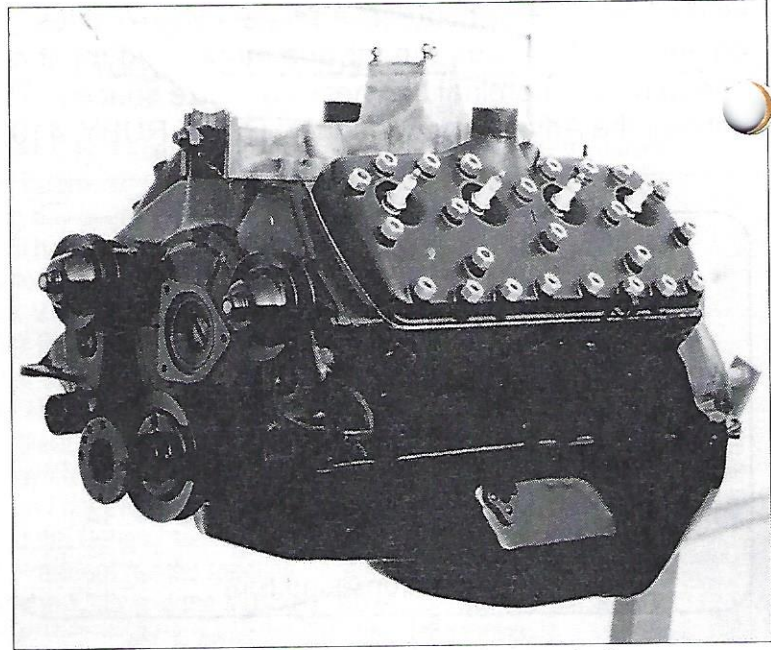
Anne Marie and I drove to Jesse's house in separate cars, just in case I had any trouble bringing the '41 Ford back to Linthicum Heights. This was a good idea, because I only got about five miles from Jesse's house, and the engine threw a rod. We had to leave the '41 on the side of the road on eastbound U.S. 40, and drive home. The next day, I had a tow truck go pick up the '41 Ford, and bring it back to our residence.

I was disappointed with the '41 Ford, and decided to strip it down for parts and get rid of it. I had a couple of friends give me a hand tearing it down, and one of them, Clarence Handy, offered me \$12 for the body and running gear. I accepted his offer, but

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During all this time, I was buying NOS parts for my little blue dream. I also bought a used deck lid and brand new tires at the parts flea market in Carlisle, Pa. Now it was time to prepare the body and frame for painting. Four coats of blue acrylic enamel were applied. The seat was reupholstered in black vinyl, and the new tires were installed. The engine was bolted in, and all the tagged parts were installed. Finally, it was coming together!

I had registered the Cushman for the AACA Eastern National Spring Meet to be held at Catonsville, on June 19, 1982. For the three nights previous to the scheduled event I worked until after midnight getting everything in order. The day of the show, I was proud as a peacock since I had the only Cushman entered in a field of seventeen entries. At the awards banquet that evening, my Cushman Scooter was awarded a First Junior. All those years of work and research had paid off!



The flathead Ford V8 engine that Don built

I still kept the instrument cluster and the engine. Handy said he wanted to make a stock-car out of the '41 Ford, but I don't think he ever did.

In 1994, while my 1939 Ford Deluxe was at Al Prueitt & Sons restoration shop, I selected the engine block that I had saved from the '41 Ford to be the basis of a rebuilt engine for the '39 Ford. A local Auto-machine shop, built the short block for me and I assembled the rest of the engine. When I went to get the engine, I was told not to worry about the small groove in one of the cylinders, because it was above the rings. They had left a groove in the cylinder wall in exact alignment with the top compression ring. I took the short block back to the machine shop and they sleeved that cylinder from the bottom since all the studs had already been installed.

It was a stock 59A block, except for the camshaft, which was an Iskenderian 3/4 Max II. I used a 1939 timing gear cover and distributor, and a set of '39 heads to make it look more like an original engine.

I finished rebuilding the engine in 1995, and took it to Prueitt's to be installed in the '39 Ford. When they fired up the engine, it sounded really good. The Iskenderian camshaft made it have a deep-throated rumble. Unfortunately, after running the engine for a while, they discovered coolant running out of the tailpipe. The cylinder heads had been planed, and I had installed them myself. I thought perhaps the block was warped. We found no head gasket leaks, and the block and heads had been magnafluxed when the engine was rebuilt.

Prueitt's shop pulled the engine back out of the Ford, and made a pressure test. To do this, they re-installed the heads, and blocked off all water outlets after filling the water jacket with dye. Then they pumped up the water jacket with air pressure and looked carefully to see where any dye was escaping. It turned out the engine block had a crack in the right front exhaust port, where it couldn't be detected by magnafluxing, **and couldn't be repaired.**

**Damn!** All that money and work down the drain. First, I was only able to drive the '41 Ford five miles when I got it, then years later, I was disappointed again. That day I wished that I had kept the '53 Pontiac. Of course, I don't have anything against Jesse Petit, because he was a good friend. Around 1963, I heard that he had moved to San Diego, and had gotten a government job working on Navy ships. *Good for him!*