

FLOURISH

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There and Back: A Journey from Minnesota to Texas and back

By Megan Blonigen

For about 20 years, Phil Bailey had an idea that “kept popping up” – driving his 1929 Model A Tudor from Paynesville, Minn., to Dallas, Texas, and back – traveling over 1,000 miles each way.

“I’m not sure where the idea came from or even when it first came to me,” he said in a book he wrote and published after his trip. At first, it seemed like a “fun pipe dream,” but the idea never went away. “Sort of like a pesky relative that just kept showing up,” he wrote.

Bailey is a 74-year-old who “enjoys fixing things” and was a private pilot for 45 years. “After retiring (for about the fourth time),” he said, “I decided that I had been talking about doing this for too long, and it was time to either get it done or admit that it was more than I could handle.”

Bailey has owned the Model A for 28 years. “I have always enjoyed working on it,” he said. “When I get into something that is over my head, I have some very smart friends who are always ready to help.”

But once he had officially decided to put his idea into action, he realized that preparing the car for a trip to Texas and back was going to be a big project. “Once I actually made the decision to go and started to consider all of the things that could go wrong on a trip of that magnitude, I was very intimidated,” Bailey said.

Bailey began researching to prepare for his trip, identifying places where he could get support along the way if he needed it. “The car after all was 95 years old,” he said.

He made several preparations in a mere two months before he left for his drive. One repair included installing a completely new engine, and the replacement engine was located over 600 miles away in Kansas, requiring a two-day road trip. Bailey also made a list of items on the



vehicle that “might not be up to the trip” and became a member of the Model A Ford Club of America, a group of Model A enthusiasts across the country. Before he left, he made sure to have a list of members he could contact if he ran into any problems along his route.

After extensive repairs on the Model A, Bailey’s departure approaching fast, and he had mixed emotions. “I’ve got to tell you that I was more than just a little nervous. Nervous, but excited too,” he said. “I have always enjoyed doing things that I thought would be difficult but possible, and that kind of described this adventure in a nutshell.”

Bailey and his wife Bonnie used to own a home in North Texas, and Bailey has family in the Dallas area, so he figured driving to Texas “was a little like going home.”

Bailey left on Monday, Sept. 23, 2024, at exactly 8:30 a.m., heading south on Highway 23 towards Willmar. “Now things are starting to get real!!!!” he wrote in his book.

Though Bailey was nervous at first about the long trip, he said he felt more comfortable by the time he had arrived in southern Minnesota. “My feelings were changing from nervous excitement to pure enjoyment,” he said. “I can’t even begin to

describe the comfortable feeling that was growing as I rode through the upper midwest farm country with the windows down and the sun on my face.”

“There are so many beautiful sights to see, so many wonderful smells to smell, and a whole lot of deep thoughts to think,” he added.

Bailey planned to drive about 250 miles each day and could not drive any faster than 55 mph, so he planned to travel mostly on country roads. He soon found it was safer to drive on four-lane roads, “where busy folks could pass me more easily,” but he also made sure to avoid congested areas during rush hours.

But driving a little over 50 mph, he ran into plenty of drivers who had to wait patiently to pass the Model A safely. “If I were driving anything other than the Model A, I’m pretty sure the gestures that I got as they passed would not have been the thumbs up with smiles,” Bailey said.

Though Bailey was “fairly confident” that the Model A would make it through the trip, he had lingering concerns about the tires – but he left well-prepared. “I did have three spares with me, and according to Bonnie enough parts and tools to build another Model A if required,” he said.

And while “the trip went

surprisingly smooth,” there were a few issues, including getting “hopelessly lost in Lincoln, Neb.”

“But not being in a hurry allowed me to find my way,” Bailey said.

When he finally arrived in Lewisville, near Dallas, he took a tour of his sister’s apartment and called his wife to let her know he had arrived at his destination. “1,125 miles in a 95-year-old Model A, not too shabby!” he wrote in his book.

Another issue came when Bailey was driving north out of Dallas on 35W. “I was warned by my sister’s neighbor that I should not even think about driving that route, but of course that’s me,” Bailey said. When driving through Denton, Texas, the road narrows to only two lanes. “Those semis were going by me at 80 mph, and it felt like they were only inches away!” Bailey said.

As soon as he was north of the Dallas metro area, he was “once again enjoying the ride.”

Until the Model A began to “just quit about every 5-10 miles.”

“I fought this for a good share of the day, finally arriving in Perkins, Okla.,” Bailey explained. “Thankfully I found an auto repair shop with an owner who enjoyed a challenge.”

Bailey worked on the Model A for about half a day. “It turned out that the cork float that is part of the fuel gauge had come loose and was breaking up into little pieces, which plugged the fuel lines and the carburetor jets,” he explained. “Once this problem was resolved, the rest of the trip was pretty smooth.”

Though there were a few challenges, Bailey remembers the trip for “all the wonderful people that I met along the way and all the everyday sights that, when you can take the time to appreciate them, are quite extraordinary.”

“Most people I know are sick and tired of politics and division

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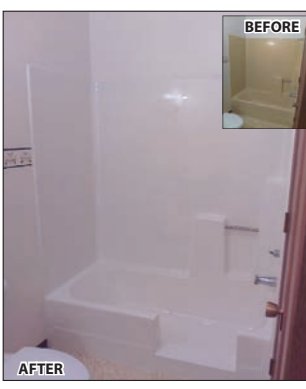
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in the world. Making this trip allowed me to see the other side, the better side of America," Bailey said.

One story that Bailey noted was when he was visiting his sister at her senior living apartment complex. He had taken some time to change the oil and rebuild the carburetor, and while working on the car, he was visited by a steady stream of people who lived in the apartment – many of whom had owned a Model A or knew someone who did. "It seemed like their patio was Grand Central Station, with someone constantly stopping by," he wrote in his book.

After an exciting journey, Bailey was getting closer and closer to Paynesville. "I could almost feel home getting closer. The further I went the more familiar things were looking," he wrote in his book. "I was cruising down the road at 52-55 mph, and the model has never run better."

"On to Olivia, then taking the bypass around Willmar, then onto a familiar Highway 23 once again, through Spicer, past New London, past Hawick," he explained, "and finally, I see the exit that I have been looking for."

Bailey arrived back in Paynesville on Thursday, Oct. 3 – 2,264 miles and 11 days later. "Man! Did that feel good!!" he wrote in his book. "Of all the sights I saw on this trip, this was the most beautiful. What a great trip, but man it's good to be home!!"

"I can't describe what it felt like to come over the hill and see Paynesville in my windshield," he said. "Actually, crossing the Iowa/Minnesota state line was like coming home. And each town I passed through was like greeting an old friend. But pulling into my driveway and seeing Bonnie waiting in the front door made all of the miles fade away. I was home, and no matter how exciting the adventure or interesting the sights, there is nothing to compare with coming home."

After the long trip, the Model A is still in great shape. "Henry Ford did an amazing job in designing and engineering the Model A. I would say that the car is in the best condition that it has been since I bought it so many years ago," Bailey said.

And if Bailey made the same trip again, he said he would "take more side trips." "Because I was not sure what to expect on this trip, I kind of stuck to my plan on the way to Texas," Bailey said. "On my way home, I was feeling a little like an old horse heading for the barn. I was ready to be home and was not too interested in making any extra stops."

"But I would like to take the time to smell the roses along the way," he added.

Bailey wanted to publish the notes he took on his trip "to help me lock all of those amazing memories firmly in my mind."

"Every once in a while, I remember something that happened on this trip or someone that I met along the



way, and it makes me smile," he said. "I decided that there were so many people who helped to make this trip possible that I needed to share the experiences with them. And of course my family is always encouraging me to write down my stories, so it seemed like writing this story seemed like the only way to end this adventure."

And now, Bailey said he "would not hesitate to hit the road tomorrow."

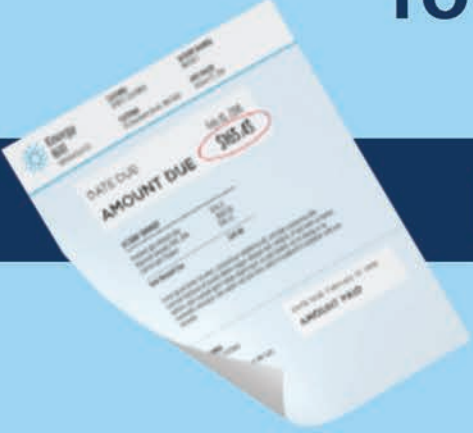
"I am planning to find some new adventures this year," Bailey said. "My Model A has turned out to be a very reliable old friend."

"There are so many things to see in the United States that it's a shame to not take the time to see them," he concluded.

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