

Cars That Matter Ep 31 – Curtis Saunders and his 1914 Model T

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Automatic Voice: From CurtCom Media.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: I certainly do think that there will be more cars that we'll look back on and we'll say that was the car that really launched this. It might be more like the propulsion technology, electric or even self-driving, but there are definitely still shifts to come in the auto industry in what we drive. I definitely think that it's going to be an exciting next century of cars.

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Automatic Voice: This is Cars That Matter. (music)

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Robert Ross: This is Robert Ross and welcome to another episode of Cars That Matter. Today we're joined by Dr. Curtis Saunders, Mechanical Engineer Researcher at Johns Hopkins University. How are things in Baltimore today Curtis?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: They're great Robert. It's a beautiful sunny day here.

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Robert Ross: And Curtis is here because he's the owner of a 1914 Ford Model T. Now I guess I could make all kinds of jokes Curtis about how you really need a PhD in mechanical engineering to work on one of these, but I'm sure it doesn't hurt.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: It's true, it's true.

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Robert Ross: First, we're going to dig into the history of the Ford Model T just to understand a little bit better why it was such an important automobile. The Ford Model T is often named the car of the century. Obviously it's an important car. Why is it important to you?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: I should say while I'm a mechanical engineer, I've always loved history. I've always been a student of history and history has always been a passion of mine. So the Model T it's important to me, one of the reasons is just the impact it had on American history and

just the auto in general. In addition just to manufacturing in general, the manufacturing methods behind the Model T, some of the things that Henry Ford really pioneered with the car, I was just really fascinated how it had in areas as well as the impact of car itself had in American culture.

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Robert Ross: From what I understand, they made about 15 million and they had quite a lifespan. The first one came out in 1908, is that right?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: Yes, that is correct.

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Robert Ross: Kind of wrapped things up by 1927 when by that time it was almost as much of an antique as it is today.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: It's amazing how long the car ran and even through its cycle while the appearance of the car changed a lot of the underlying mechanical structure while it had some changes it remained basically the same, the same four cylinder engine, the same two-speed transmission. The bones of the car really did run 20 years.

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Robert Ross: I remember years and years ago in my former life, I worked with the operating engineers at UCLA and we'd have these emergency generator rooms. Now UCLA campus was built back in the 1920s and we actually had an emergency generator that was still powered by a Model T engine. This was back in the eighties. Imagine that, that old engine was deemed reliable enough and competent enough to be working all those decades later and I guess it was really Testament to the endurance of that particular design. You talk about Henry Ford and how the Model T was really the first mass produced car, but I almost get the feeling Henry could have been making washing machines or vacuum cleaners. In a lot of ways the Model T was a test bed for the whole production line process.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: You're absolutely right. The moving assembly line process was not unique to Model T's. It's been applied to so many different types of products from airplanes, trains, cars, like you said household goods, washing machines, TVs, just the idea of that type of process. We take it for granted now, but someone had to think of it first and there had to be a pioneer that and the type of industry that really

started this whole thing,

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Robert Ross: Not only introducing a whole new way of making things, it was done so efficiently and relatively inexpensively that it gave any American with a halfway decent paying job the opportunity to own a car.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: In Ford's heyday he was rolling a car off the assembly line every 90 seconds.

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Robert Ross: From what I understand though, maybe you can correct me if I'm wrong, the Model T was such a grand vision of Henry Ford's that he actually set up manufacturing facilities or plants all around the country and even in other continents.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: He truly believed it was the car for the masses. I don't think he really viewed it as just something for a specific region or even a specific country or specific time. He thought he'd really distilled down the essential components of a vehicle and that that's what anyone in the world would want.

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Robert Ross: I guess there was more than just one Model T, everything from pickup trucks to delivery vans, they made a whole bunch them, didn't they?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: Yes, absolutely. There was various types of cars from two seaters to four seaters to even enclosed cars and open cars later. And right, they had a whole line of trucks. You could even buy a Model T rolling chassis and build your own body for it. If you didn't like what Ford was offering, you could just build your own. You're not even limited to cars. Like you said, the power plant could just buy the Ford engine, the Ford power plant and just have all sorts of other applications

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Robert Ross: That would make a nice margarita blender, wouldn't it? Just about the right amount of horsepower to get that ice just, just right. Everybody knows what one looks like, but I suspect most people don't really understand what it takes to make one move. It's got a little engine. What is it like a three liter inline four or something like that?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: It's a little inline four and it has a two speed transmission.

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Robert Ross: What's the horsepower output on that engine? What do you figure?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: It was rated at 22 and a half horsepower.

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Robert Ross: Wow, okay.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: So there's a lot of lawnmowers today. You can buy it a riding mower from a hardware store that has more horsepower than this little Model T.

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Robert Ross: You look at a car today and you look at it a little Model T and it's the difference between chalk and cheese. We take so many darn things for granted. The first thing we take for granted is just being able to put a key in the ignition and start at or these days, walk to the car and press a button. Back then you had to get out and crank and as I understand it wasn't until 1912, the Cadillac introduced an electric starter. When did the Model T get a starter motor?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: The Model T got an electric start in 1919.

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Robert Ross: Other stuff that you don't think about, what if I'm driving at night? People had lanterns. Didn't these things have acetylene lanterns or something on them?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: Yes, acetylene lanterns and then oil side lamps, oil marker lights for the side. Driving at night wasn't just a matter of turning your lights on.

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Robert Ross: What do you have to do? Take us through the process. You've got these acetylene, do you like blow your head off like coyote in the roadrunner cartoon or is this stuff safe?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: It's safe. They had to be careful. It's a flammable gas, but first you have to generate the acetylene gas. So their cars have a little acetylene generator on the running board and it's basically a tank of water and below that is some calcium carbide rock that you would put in and you have a little needle valve and the water drips onto the rock.

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Robert Ross: Sounds like you're setting up an execution in a gas chamber, [inaudible 00:00:06:20].

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Dr Curtis Saunders: You had to have a little chemistry experiment right on the running board there.

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Robert Ross: That's awesome.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: It runs for a while to build up gas pressure and then the gas is piped to the two headlights and then at some point when the gas is flowing, you light a match and that's how you let your headlights. You can control the valve and the flow of the gas a little bit to make them slightly brighter and dimmer, but in general what they are is what they are

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Robert Ross: I'm fascinated, that's great. And guess what? We haven't even put it in first gear. First of all, I'm confused man. There are three pedals in this thing and not like the three pedals we have at our manual cars today. How do you drive it? Set us behind the wheel and take us on a drive.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: So when you're sitting in the driver's seat, you'll notice three pedals. The left one is labeled clutch, the middle one is reverse and the one on the far right is brake and then on the steering wheel, there's two different levers, one on the left and one on the right. On your dashboard, you do have a key and on the far side, you have a little needle vial, a little rod to a needle vial, and these are all things you need to adjust to get the car started and running.

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Robert Ross: I've already crashed, I can't manage that many things.

It's like being an octopus on a drum kit. How do you learn this?
What do you do first?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: The first thing that you do is you turn the key to on, but that doesn't start the car. That's just sends the ignition, there's a little battery in the car. So that sends the spark to the spark plug basically, and then you put the lever on the far left, that's the spark that controls the timing sequence when the spark plug fires to where the piston is in the cylinder.

So you put that all the way up to have it fire later and that's where people would normally have backfires and issues with the crank spinning around and breaking their arm is the ignition will be too far advanced. So you put the left lever up, which is the spark. You put the throttle a little bit down. He's on on. There's a little needle valve on the dashboard. You have a turn and a half open. That controls the fuel air mixture and the carburetor. Now you make sure the parking brake is set to on. These are all things you need to before for the car will even start.

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Robert Ross: So I take it all back. You really do have to be a PhD.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: Do not worry about it being stolen, I'll tell you that.

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Robert Ross: Well let me ask you, are these things reliable?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: Absolutely, they were very reliable. They're just so simple. It's just a very simple car. There's very few moving parts and the tolerances are in general a lot laxer than the modern challenges we have for engines. So even if some things break on it, in general it can keep running. Things can be pretty far out of spec for this car to run. It might not run well, but it will run.

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Robert Ross: It might be blowing a quart of oil every two blocks, but-

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Dr Curtis Saunders: But it's running.

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Robert Ross: What about stopping? Do they have anything for brakes or do you have to be Fred Flinstone?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: You basically have to be Fred Flinstone with this car. It does have a brake. There's just a single drum on the transmission and you have a band which has some treated cotton on it. When you push the brake pedal, it just kind of clamps down on the drum and then the friction between those is what slows your car. It does not even, drum brakes on the four wheels are just brakes. It's just a single drum on the transmission.

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Robert Ross: Cotton like fabric for a brake?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: Yes, but Ford actually advertised that as a feature in the car because the brake drum was inside the transmission. So he described it as the car would stop the same, whether it was wet or dry. Other cars had these treated cotton bands around the drum as well, but it wasn't enclosed in the transmission. So if it was wet out or grimy, you might have reduced clamping power, so.

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Robert Ross: This is truly awesome, stuff that we don't even think about. Let's talk numbers. How fast does it go? How fast do you drive this thing?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: The 1814s didn't come with the speedometer. That was not a standard thing. So a lot of my speeds are guessed. I feel like a GPS on there sometimes though to get an idea and I'd say mine cruises about 35, 40 miles an hour.

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Robert Ross: Sounds perfect.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: You can go faster, but the wheels aren't balanced. It still has its original brake. So it gets harder to stop and harder to control at the faster speed. So 35 to 40 is good for cruising. No, it only has two gears. So it really does not like going uphill. They really would love a third gear when it goes up a hill.

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Robert Ross: Well I guess that's what a passenger's for, to get

out and push, huh? How many people fit inside that thing?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: Mine's a touring cars, so it's a front and rear seat and it will comfortably fit two in the front, two in the back. You can squeeze three adults in the back. You can have people standing on the running boards I suppose if you wanted to add more, but I would say four to five comfortably.

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Robert Ross: I'm sure that poor little motor is going to be straining if you get more than five big frat guys in there?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: The car will definitely tell you when you're hauling passengers versus when you're just taking it out or a drive by yourself.

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Robert Ross: Well they can't weigh much, probably a 1500 pound guard?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: They're very light, it's wood and metal. It doesn't have all the features and all the extra reinforcing that a modern car would have. It's just a wood carriage body covered in sheet metal, put on top of a light duty frame.

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Robert Ross: Your car have a name?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: It does not actually, because I only have one Model T I just call it the Model T.

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Robert Ross: They used to call them a Tin Lizzie and there was a lot of question about where that name came from.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: Tin Lizzie, yes.

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Robert Ross: What did they do for gasoline back then? Did they have gas stations like we have today?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: So they did. Early on gasoline was one of

the byproducts that will come about when trying to refine for kerosene because everyone had kerosene and oil lamps and gas was just this byproduct that came through their refining process they didn't really know what to do with. So they're already producing gasoline before they really had a big market for it.

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Robert Ross: No kidding, so it's like all dressed up and nowhere to go. We got this stuff, now we have to figure out what we can use it for.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: Yeah, exactly. When refining first started, people mainly want kerosenes, they weren't producing it, but you had to build up your gas station infrastructure and you had the old glass pumps that people see in the small underground tanks, but that was definitely a major challenge is you have this car now, but now you need to build up this infrastructure to fuel it.

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Robert Ross: What did they do for electrical system? I know the original Model T's didn't have batteries at all and I'm sure yours has got an electrical system in it, is that right?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: Mine has a 12 volt battery under the rear seat and that basically just fires the four spake plugs. When you're starting the car, it switches to battery, but they also had a magneto. It's an eight or nine volt magneto, which can generate its own electricity. I start the car on battery and then once it's running, I switch it over to magneto and the car is producing its own electricity, but the entire wiring harness is the wire that goes from the battery to the ignition switch, the four wires that go to the spark plugs.

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Robert Ross: That is every mechanic's dream. Instead of trying to untangle a rat's nest, the stuff. You work on some of these old Italian cars and that harness is so snake bit. One wire starts out red and it ends up being green.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: The wires of course have all been replaced, but I don't think it's given me any electrical issues. One of the interesting things about the electrical system on this car is, (inaudible) car is actually coming full circle with this is each spark has its own ignition coil. Instead of a

single coil with a distributor which distributes it out. In my case, there's four different ignition coils. Each has its own spark plug and they sit on the dashboard.

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Robert Ross: That's positively modern, it's 21st century.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: Yeah, exactly. We now have half of the coil packs, now they're going back to that for the spark plugs. It come full circle and actually I had a coil go bad while I was driving. It was actually when I was on a tour with a bunch of Model T's. The car just started running rough and it didn't have the power and one of the club members looked, " Oh, one of the coils went bad." That happens, just switched out and put in another one. They said, " You can do that while driving too, that's happened to us. " Because it's right there on the dashboards. You just pop the coil out pop a new one in and they keep going.

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Robert Ross: Boy, what a whole different world.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: It's just so simple that things can go wrong, but the car will still run. It's a very forgiving car. I joke out of all of my cars is the most reliable.

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Robert Ross: That's great. We're going to take a short break, but we'll be right back.

00:13:05

Automatic Voice: Welcome to Life Done Better. Listen to the weekly episodes where super model and health coach, Jill De Young talks to some of the world's most inspiring women in health and wellness. It's the place for all the unicorns who strive to create a life on their own terms join us to explore, discover and create a life done better, together. Listen and subscribe from CurtCo Media, media for your mind.

00:13:37

Robert Ross: We're back with Curtis Saunders. Curtis, tell us your story and tell us about your car.

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Automatic Voice: My uncle bought a 1914 Ford Model T in 1968. It didn't run. So we would go and sit in it and play with it. We'd play with the levers and the pedals and the steering wheel. So I really, even from a young age, I grew

up playing with this car that sat in the garage. And then when I was in high school, it was summer of 2004, my best friend Pete and I, he kept nagging me to get the car out. "You've got this great car in your garage and your uncle has this car. You really need to get it out and drive it." So I was like, " Oh, you're absolutely right," and here we are high schoolers and we have learners permits, so we're all excited. We got the car out and then pushed it around the block to a garage where I could work on it. At first, we vacuumed it and cleaned it up and then we had it pushed around the block and in the garage and my uncle got home from work and we were like, " Hey, look at this great thing. We're going to get it running," and he was all excited. He was like, " Oh yeah, that's great." And so we spent a few days working on it and then summer of 2004, it finally fired right up. There's a plume of blue smoke that engulfed us. We had poured oil in the four cylinders to try to keep everything lubricated as we were starting it, but of course all this oil burned off as soon as it started running, so we were just engulfed in this plume of smoke as this thing started.

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Robert Ross: What a great science experiment, I love it. You're a young guy. For anyone under 60 to have an interest in these cars is probably a bit of an anomaly and I think that's fascinating, clearly the connection then was not just the mechanical one, but maybe something a little more personal.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: Absolutely. I grew up hearing stories that my uncle told me when he had done work on it and had driven it when he was younger. He drove it for about 10 years from 1968 to the late seventies where it was parked. So yeah, having this great car in my backyard and hearing all these fun stories about it from him and the work he did really peaked my interest and then getting it running and then he and I would drive it and work on it and just swap stories about the projects we were doing,

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Robert Ross: Everybody jokes about what Henry Ford told his customers, " You can have any color as long as it's black." Am I to assume yours is an old black Model T?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: It is an old black Model T, yes.

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Robert Ross: They look good in that color and let's talk about the car itself then and your restoration work. Obviously you had to completely recommission this. How have you approached it? Is it more of a sympathetic restoration or is it a showroom deal or what was your approach?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: Out of necessity, when I first started working on it, I really didn't do bodywork. So doing a complete taking it apart and repainting was off the table and it was also the paint was in pretty good shape from when it was restored. I really approached it as a mechanical restoration to do what I needed to to get the car to run safely and reliably, but also keep it mostly original as I could. So I definitely haven't added a whole lot of features or upgrades to the car. I really wanted the car to be the technology it was in 1914, but at some point you have to make a guess as to what might've been on it.

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Robert Ross: Is there such a thing as original engines in the Model T community or I guess the engines don't blow up though?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: The engine is original as I can say. The serial number on the block dates to July of 1914 and the body also has the components of a 1914. So I can say it's a 1914, but it's not like a modern car where you have a VIN on the engine block which matches the frame. So it really can't go to that detail, but it is as far as the Model T community goes, it's a 1914 engine. When I was in high school, the other hobby I had was actually volunteering at some local state parks with old forts, like a Seacoast defense fortifications from the Civil War after World War II and so we would take the Model T to Portsmouth, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, New Jersey across the Delaware river. And we have World War I uniforms. [Horse shack 00:00:16:50] and World War I would not probably have been uncommon to see a Model T driving around the fort. So it was just really popular for people too because it just gave them another aspect of the history of the area to see the car running and driving and just moving all around.

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Robert Ross: I have to plug one of my favorite places in the world and that's the Henry Ford museum in Dearborn, but especially Greenfield village and to visit Greenfield Village and understand what Henry Ford and his cohorts, Thomas Edison and all those guys, the Wright brothers, all the great

inventors of the era did. And to be able to actually live it in a small town environment that was created in Greenfield Village, I would say that it's literally a Disneyland for kids and adults who are interested in American history and the invention of some of the fundamental machines and concepts that built America.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: I agree. That's on my bucket list. I have not been there, but I've read a lot about it. It was interesting Ford built six brand new Model T's. So at least several of them are at that village that you can ride in. Some of the cars they use, they continued the assembly line and they got subsequent serial numbers after the last Model T and they built some brand new ones.

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Robert Ross: I had no idea.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: It's one thing to see the car or learn about history in a museum or in a book, but it's entirely different to see it like a working museum that's not just static where you see everything's coming to life.

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Robert Ross: Talk about the community for a minute. As I pointed out, you're a pretty young guy to have such an old car. I know that Model T's and Model A's were all the collectible rage back in the fifties and sixties, and you don't see many of them around anymore, where are they all lurking and who are the owners?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: You're right. There was a big rage back in the fifties, sixties that really launched a lot of the old car hobbies, but a lot of them are still around. They're just in garages. They might be in your neighbor's garage. One of the things that's become harder with Model T's is as general cars get faster and roads get bigger, it's less and less safe to take them on main roads. I have to be very careful in planning routes. One of the benefits is I really like road cycling. I can find similar routes for both of my hobbies and then what's popular goes with different ages of people. As certain generations get older, they're attracted to certain cars. I am definitely an anomaly as a 33 year old really being into Model T's, but I will tell you though, my experience when I pull up to traffic lights, the Model T's generally get more honks and ways than a Firebird or something. It's just people are just amazed to see it still

on the road.

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Robert Ross: What about rallies? Do you close yet together and drive these things in mass?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: Absolutely. So there's national meets, there's local meets, there's local clubs where you go to a drive in. There's all sorts of different levels of communities for people wanting to get involved. Growing up, I was involved in the Delaware Model T Club. I went on some club tours with them, which was just a lot of fun to get a group of Model T owners together. And then of course, I've gone to some of the shows, Hershey is the big one in Pennsylvania, it's not too far away. I've been really happy with the different Model T communities that I've come across and the different states I've lived in. When I was growing up in Delaware, that was a really great way as a kid to see that there was other cars out there. And that really got me to the next level of driving it around a few blocks. The first tour I did with the club, it really got me more comfortable taking it on longer drives. I got to see that these guys are just taking them out, they're not worried.

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Robert Ross: I know that the guys at Hagerty, the insurance group who publish some great magazines and have a lot of enthusiasts in their ranks. They had a program a couple of years ago where I guess one of their guys fixed and drove a Model T across the country. That was very inspiring. What's the furthest you've driven your car?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: The furthest I've driven the cars across state lines from Delaware to Maryland. I have trailered the car. The furthest the car has been is Canada. When I was in graduate school at the University of Vermont, I had the car with me in Burlington and a few of my grad school friends and I, we got in the car and we drove it up to Canada, so we crossed the border. So the car has left the country. That was probably the first time in it's 100 year history that it left the United States. We not only drove it across the border, we took it to a drive through a zoo. So we had the top down and there was camels, elk, and ostriches that were coming into the car and you could feed them. So we had a giant bag of carrots and we were just feeding these animals just from this Model T and of course everyone else, and they have windows and there's like things to protect you from the animals. So they were just right in

our laps and it was the most insane thing to do with an old car.

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Robert Ross: Oh, that's incredible. Those ostrich are pretty formidable, they can get in your face.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: They were a little aggressive. The camels loved us. They're just so happy. I was like "One of these camels could just push this car right over if it wanted to." Like " Is this really a good idea?"

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Robert Ross: Curtis, that's great. We're going to take a quick break and then we'll be right back.

00:21:12

Ad Voice #2: A Moment of Your Time, a new podcast from CurtCo Media.

00:21:17

Speaker 5: Currently 21 years old, and today I'm going to read a poem for you.

00:21:20

Speaker 6: It felt like magic extended from her fingertips down to the base of mine.

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Speaker 7: You have to take care of yourself because the world needs you and your work.

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Speaker 8: Trust me, every do gooder that asked about me, was ready to spit on my dreams.

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Speaker 9: Her fingers were facing me.

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Speaker 10: You can feel like your purpose and your worth is really being questioned.

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Speaker 11: They're going to stop me from playing the piano.

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Speaker 12: She buys walkie talkies wonders to whom she should give the second [crosstalk 00:21: 39].

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Speaker 13: Cats don't love humans. We never did. We never will. We just find-

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Speaker 14: The beauty of rock climbing is that you can only focus on what's right in front of you.

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Speaker 15: And so our American life begins.

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Ad Voice #2: We may need to stay apart, but let's create together. Available on all podcast platforms. Submit your piece at curtco.com/amomentofyourtime.

00:22:03

Robert Ross: Welcome back to Cars That Matter. I should've known you were a guy who didn't have just one car. Tell us about some of the other cars in your garage or shall I call them antiques?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: They're both, you're absolutely right. Once you have one car and you really get bit by the old car bug, it's hard to just stop with the one. Once I got the car running and we started enjoying it, my uncle was also really bit by the bug. So there's the 1914 Ford Model T, there is a 1930 Ford Model A.

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Robert Ross: Oh, well now the Model A. Okay, stop right there. That was essentially its successor, is that right?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: Yes, it was.

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Robert Ross: And damn near as popular as the T. I know the Model A was the staple up to probably up to World War II.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: You can really see the difference in the technologies, even between those two cars. It really helps that I have an earlier brass era Model to use because I have a lot of brass trim on the crank start and acetylene gas headlights and then you progress to the Model A, which is electric starter, electric headlights, electric horn. It's an enclosed car. It has four wheel drum brakes, it has your

standard transmission, the clutch pedal, brake pedal accelerator with your standard age three speed in reverse transmission, which is becoming much close to what you would think of as a moderate car. The sheet metal is a little more styled.

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Robert Ross: It actually had a couple little curves in it if you look real hard.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: It's true, it's true. We started rounding things over.

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Robert Ross: What about the engine? What are those, has similar in line four?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: Similar in line four, but we're at 40 horsepower now and a whole extra gear.

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Robert Ross: What color is your A?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: It's Navy blue with black fenders and yellow wheels? The color is straw, so straw wheels.

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Robert Ross: You're really styler. That's the Brooks Brothers of Model A's, that was a good look.

00:23:45

Dr Curtis Saunders: Instead of brass trim, which has to be polished, it is stainless steel, so you don't have to do anything at all.

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Robert Ross: Well so far, I'd call you a Ford man. What else you got?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: Also have a 1931 Buick.

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Robert Ross: You jumped ship to GM.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: The restoration is still in progress. I was

working on that while I was in graduate school. It was a nice outlet from research to have a project like that to work on.

00:24:05

Robert Ross: I'll bet it was, that's nice to have a little bit of a distraction there, huh?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: Yes and I'm fascinated by the '31 Buick because it has a straight eight engine, double the number of cylinders, but they're all in a row, a straight eight.

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Robert Ross: Straight eight was an engineering challenge because you got that big long crank and you got a lot of temperature challenges, maintaining constant temperatures across such a long series of components. Of course you get that good looking long hood to go with it.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: It's a beautiful car and it's a big enclosed car too. It's a seven passenger sedan and it'll be done someday.

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Robert Ross: I suspect that's not your last car though.

00:24:37

Dr Curtis Saunders: I also have a 1956 Ford Thunderbird. So again, with the Fords.

00:24:42

Robert Ross: That's not only a modern car by comparison, but it's also quite a beautiful classic and certainly among the T-birds that and the five, six and seven, those are the three one you want. Maybe a '63, a lot of nice Thunderbirds out there. But certainly the first series were the ones that everybody really thinks about.

00:24:57

Dr Curtis Saunders: I just love the look of it. It's a great looking car.

00:25:00

Robert Ross: What are your plans? You got any big drives ahead of you?

00:25:02

Dr Curtis Saunders: The next big drive for the car will be at

my wedding. I'm getting married this October and a Model T will be our wedding car.

00:25:08

Robert Ross: Congratulations, that's awesome.

00:25:10

Dr Curtis Saunders: Thank you.

00:25:10

Robert Ross: Who needs a Rolls Royce convertible for a wedding limousine when you've got a Model T that you actually built yourself? That is fantastic. I'm sure your uncle would be thrilled.

00:25:20

Dr Curtis Saunders: It's a great way to remember him and to really just continue to enjoy the car and have it continue to be a part of my life moving forward.

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Robert Ross: Well then I have to ask, is your fiance into cars?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: She loves it. She's driven it too. She thinks it's awesome. It's easy to teach her to drive it because she already knew the principle of the clutch and all that.

00:25:35

Robert Ross: That's fantastic. Well, if I ever get back East I may look you up and hit you up for a driving lesson because I would be thrilled to get behind the wheel of something like that. It sounds like so much fun.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: Anytime.

00:25:44

Robert Ross: I always like to ask our guests, if you could have any three cars, what would you pick?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: That's a great question. I think definitely finishing the restorations is a top priority to really just get to enjoy them and see that go full circle to finally get to the part of driving. I really just love all brass cars. The older, the better. I would love an old Stanley or Doble steam car.

00:26:06

Robert Ross: Okay, yeah.

00:26:06

Dr Curtis Saunders: Also, the other one is an old brass car called an American Underslung.

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Robert Ross: They look like a race, well they were.

00:26:12

Dr Curtis Saunders: I just love the look.

00:26:14

Robert Ross: The best look in the world, huh? That's fantastic. And it's especially gratifying to know that the brass flame is alive with a whole younger generation of enthusiasts. What advice would you give somebody if they thought they wanted to do something as out there as go back in time and look for a brass era car? Would a Model T be a place to start? .

00:26:32

Dr Curtis Saunders: Absolutely. I would say Model T's or Model A's, but I definitely am partial to the T's. In terms of the antique cars, they're very available. There's a wealth of information and aftermarket parts available. If you need to find a part and you can pretty much buy most things new for these cars, there's enough of them where it's vendors can make new parts to them. The information is there. There's different clubs you can join. There's people that can help you if you get stuck. And I would just say, don't be afraid to try. I learned by doing and when I started I was just a high schooler and I had done some work on lawn mowers, fine. I didn't know how to restore a car or how to work on things, but you take it apart. Sometimes you're smart enough to take pictures as you go, sometimes you're not. And you have to go back to figure out how someone else put it together. But I would just say, don't be afraid to try.

00:27:14

Robert Ross: That's great. So just pretend it's a giant model kit and start from scratch.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: Exactly, if you get stuck there's help along the way.

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Robert Ross: Now are you going to get thrown out of the club if you decide to paint one something other than black?

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Dr Curtis Saunders: You may get some looks, but-

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Robert Ross: Well it keeps saying it's easy. You don't have to worry about what you're going to wear.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: Exactly, it's true. That's one less decision you have to make with the restoration process.

00:27:32

Robert Ross: So Curtis, let's change our perspective. Let me ask you, what do you think about the future of car collecting?

00:27:39

Dr Curtis Saunders: It's a more accessible hobby than many people think. My Model T, it's not a million dollar car. It's maybe like \$ 14000. Not everyone has \$ 14000 laying around to go buy a car, but I would say that the future of the hobby, it's more accessible than many people think there's. Plenty of collector cars, just pick up a Hemmings or some classified digest and you'll see that there's plenty that are within range. It's going to be really interesting for me as a 33 year old is seeing over the next 20, 30 years, the cars that I remember from my youth that are going to become collectible much less. I've heard stories on other people talk about that, but I will definitely experience that and it'll just be very interesting to see what will become collectible because there's always going to be things that are collectible and it's only like a brass era car isn't as collectible as it once was, there will certainly be new types of cars that are discovering and people want to keep after.

So I the future of the hobby is, I'm hoping it sticks around. I love it. It's been a great experience for me and I think it'll stick around, that it'll just be fascinating to see what becomes collectible, but I would just encourage people. Like I said, it's more accessible than you think, it doesn't have to be a show winning restoration. If it looks good from 10 feet away and you enjoy driving it, all the better. Even if it doesn't look good from 10 feet away, but you enjoy driving it.

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Robert Ross: Probably have more fun that way anyway because we

don't have to worry about the rock chips.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: Exactly.

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Robert Ross: It's funny, brand new cars become old cars eventually and take it from me time flies and I remember buying some new cars that today are treasured classics. So it happens quickly. Talking about those future classics, do you think any car from the past 100 years will really have the same impact and significance as the Ford Model T? Anything else you can think of?

00:29:15

Dr Curtis Saunders: It's hard to say for me for sure. I think that there will, something will have an impact similar to the Model T. The Model T was just very unique in how it brought the cars to the country and it gave the working person, it was the first car they could afford. It really put the people on wheels. The next big shift would probably be an electric or some sort of alternative energy car. Of course we already have cars, we already have Rose, so it wouldn't be the same type of impact as the Model T and I certainly do think that there will be more cars that we'll look back on and we'll say "That was the car that really launched this movement, this revolution." Of course Ford new early, early 10 or so years in, he was really onto something because he was cranking out a car every 90 seconds.

Wasn't immediate, it took a while for it to really build up and build up. It might be more like the propulsion technology, electric or even self-driving, but there are definitely still shifts to come in the auto industry and what we drive and when we look back on it we'll be able to say, "This is really what launched that movement." I definitely think that it's going to be an exciting next century of cars. As someone who loves driving, I'm like, "Ah," but also as someone who sits in DC, Baltimore traffic everyday, I'm like, "Oh, that could be nice, not to have to drive."

00:30:14

Robert Ross: Well that's what the T's for for the weekend and the autonomous EV is for the day to day. Maybe it's the best of both worlds and I hope we're all enjoying both of those.

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Dr Curtis Saunders: It will be really fascinating. I'm excited to live through this change and to really see what's next on the horizon. It's just an exciting time to be a car guy

and to be interested in cars.

00:30:34

Robert Ross: What a great conversation. Dr. Curtis Saunders, I really want to thank you for joining us and taking time out of your busy and mechanical engineering research work and to talk about something a little more down home, which is Model T that obviously has stolen a piece of your heart.

00:30:50

Dr Curtis Saunders: It was a lot of fun coming here today, talking to you about the car. It's been great for me too.

00:30:53

Robert Ross: Well, all the best for you and your upcoming wedding and send us a picture, will you?

00:30:56

Dr Curtis Saunders: Will do.

00:30:57

Robert Ross: Thanks to Curtis Saunders for joining us today on Cars That Matter. Come back next time as we continue to talk about the passions that drive us and the passions we drive.

This episode of Cars That Matter was hosted by Robert Ross, produced by Chris Border, edited by Chris Porter, sound engineering by Michael Kennedy, theme song by Celeste and Eric Dick. Additional music and sound by Chris Porter. Please like, subscribe and share this podcast. I'm Robert Ross and thanks for listening.

00:31:40

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