


How to drive a Model T — Henry Ford Estate

Video:  How to drive a Model T

Duration: 6:30

Transcript:

Video Transcript

Ed Hebb (00:16)

My name is Ed Hebb.

Ed Hebb (00:57)

The Model T, being very simple, does require some maintenance. Before we take this car out on the road, I have a little checklist that I run through. We'll check and make sure that the gas is going to flow from the gas tank into the carburetor. And we have a fuel switch here, which is now off, we'll turn it to on. And then the next step is to check that there is gasoline in the tank. The gas tank being under the seat, we raise the seat cushion, open the filler on the tank, and use a dipstick to see how much gas is in there.

(01:48)

Well right now it shows there's seven gallons in the tank, so that will take us quite a few — well over a hundred miles. Now to make sure there's enough oil in the engine we use — instead of a dipstick, like a modern car — we use this tool here, which reaches down and catches hold of a couple of petcocks under the car, and we open each of those, and to see if oil drips out and to see if oil drips out onto the ground. If it does that shows that the oil level is proper. This is the same thing my father would have done when he purchased his first Model T back in 1921.

(02:36)

This car, particular one, was built in 1916, and it wasn't until three years later that Mr. Ford installed electric starters on his car. So, we had to hand crank it. Sometimes if the person was careless, the hand crank would come around and flip around backwards, and perhaps breaks a person's wrist. Unfortunately, that was true. So, as a safety measure this particular car has been equipped with an electric starter.

(03:21)

Before we are ready to roll, we want to make sure that the tires are properly inflated. Now these tires, as you can see, are pretty skinny, unlike a modern car, which carries a pressure of 28 or so pounds. The pressure in these little tires is 55 pounds. And today they look as though they're alright. But I think we're ready to hit the road.

(03:52)

The controls for a Model T are quite different than a modern car. They are quite simple. After all, millions of people learned to drive on a Model T, and I'll just point those out. So, the steering wheel, at least, it acts the same as a modern wheel. You turn it to the right, the car goes to the right, to the left, so forth. These two levers that are under the steering wheel, however, are different. This one on the left is the spark advance, retard in that position, advance all the way down. On the other side we have the hand throttle. The Model T has no accelerator on the floor, instead the engine speed is controlled by this hand throttle. As you move it down, the engine goes faster and faster.

(04:42)

And on the floor of the Model T are three pedals which stick out. This car has only two speeds forward. To get the low speed, you step on the left-hand pedal, push it all the way down, and the car moves forward in low gear. To get high speed, you release the hand brake, and the left pedal, then you're in high speed. So there you have it. Push down for low, lift up for high. On the right-hand side, you have a conventional brake pedal. When you want to stop, you step on it, just like in a modern car. Now, can you guess what the center pedal is for? Of course, when you want to back up, you step on the reverse pedal, and back the car goes. Now you notice that with two good feet, you can go forward or back very rapidly in sequence, something you cannot do with any modern car.

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