

INTRODUCTION... John and Rita Buckley are well known in the Model A Ford community in Europe for the long tours they undertake using their 1930 Tudor. Over the years on various trips they have travelled as far as Turkey on the fringe of Europe, Morocco in north Africa, north east to the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, and north as far as you can go- North Cape Norway. They have also toured round Australia in 1929 Model A Phaeton.

In 2020 they finally visited Canada, here they relate their story.

An A in BC

(OK clever clogs, a Model A in British Columbia)

By John Buckley

It all started back in the summer 2019 with a question and answer session between Rita and myself

Q: Rita- “*What do you want as a 70th birthday present?*”

A: Me- “*A visit to British Columbia*”

Q: Rita- “*In a car?*”

A: Both of us - “*Oh yes, it has to be a Model A, surely!*”

Planning was started and by the autumn of 2019 a search of websites in Canada uncovered a suitable 1930 Tudor. Bought sight unseen, part of the deal with the vendor on Vancouver Island was that he would deliver the car to our friends Sherry and Ian in Invermere on the other side of British Columbia a mere 600 miles away -not far in Canadian terms.

By early 2020 we were ready for our trip, and return flights were booked from the UK to Canada. Spares had been ordered to await our arrival at Invermere and everything was set for action stations. However, three weeks before our departure the cloud of COVID descended across the world and everything was cancelled.

Subsequent hopes were deferred twice. But in the spring of 2022 life started getting normalized and we rebooked flights; finally arriving in Canada June 2022, two years later than originally envisaged.

On arrival at Invermere we inspected the car for the first time in the flesh; the bodywork and interior were better than they looked on the photographs (a rare event!). Ian had convinced me that the mountains roads of British Columbia would be steeper and longer than anything I had ever thought possible, so we had ordered in advance a new radiator and water pump. Our first couple of days at Ian and Sherry’s were spent fettling car, fitting the new radiator, water pump, spark plugs, and a rebuilt carburettor (brought over in my hand luggage). By the end of day two we had the car starting on the button, road tested, running beautifully on the local roads and gradients around Invermere.

Rita and I loaded the car to the gunwales in our usual fashion; tent, sleeping bags, camping kit, spare parts and tools and set off.



Brisco Trading Post near Radium

Leaving the first campground things did not bode well; just as I was driving out of the exit I stopped to take a photo of the mountain view but my eye was sadly drawn from the magnificent scenery to a flat tyre on the right rear. Of course, all the tools were at the bottom of the packing so the delay cost us about 30 minutes; however we were fortunate to get the new tube fitted (I was carrying three spare ones!) at the next town en-route; about 30 miles north.

Back on the highway we started in earnest on the mountains of British Columbia. A drive to the top of Kicking Horse Pass on that hot morning was our baptism by fire- being fully loaded to reach the summit necessitated several miles of 2nd gear crawling for the Tudor. However, the car performed faultlessly, and it was reassuring to appreciate that having surmounted this challenge the rest of the planned journey should be feasible.

Until that first day of mountain roads I had not really accepted, despite Ian's warnings, just how difficult our planned route across the province of BC and back would be. From Kicking Horse Pass we realised we had let ourselves in for what was to be the most challenging tour we have ever undertaken.

Several days were spent driving and sightseeing in the National Parks of Banff and Jasper, gently driving the Tudor up to the summit of Sunwapta Pass- just over 2000 metres our highest elevation- and eventually tackling the gentler gradients through Yellow Head Pass and Mount Robson Park.



6000 ft. elevation

During the trip the car generally needed topping up with a litre of water per day, oil consumption nil. After the initial flat tyre, the tyres (Goodyears all round) held air and needed no further inflation. Fuel consumption? I was enjoying my holiday so I didn't want to know, but we topped up whenever the gauge was approaching $\frac{1}{2}$.



Jasper National Park

The only time on the outward journey that we had an enforced roadside stop was when the car started misfiring suddenly one morning after 500 miles of faultless motoring ... “*It’s the fuel.*” says Rita, after a few seconds juddering “*No it’s not.*” says I, “*I’ll clean the points.*” I did so but it was still misfiring. “*I bet you it’s the fuel.*” says Rita ... “*Bah, most unlikely, I’ll reset the timing a smidge*” I responded ... Still no different even with reset timing. “*I tell you it’s the fuel*” says Rita ... So just to pander her I check the fuel flow to the carb. How humiliating; fuel was running but indeed rather slowly. The glass sediment bowl had a micro filter fitted. I removed that – returning the system to original spec and the misfire problem was instantly cured. (I have never had any truck with micro-filters deeming them an unnecessary extra- this confirms my opinion!)

Our journey continued through the ever-present mountains of BC until several days and many miles later we finally arrived at Prince Rupert on the western seaboard of Canada. This achievement was followed by a day of rest and recreation, relaxing on the car-ferry southbound to Vancouver Island.

Disembarking from the ferry back onto land at 23.30 pm tested our headlight candlepower. The headlights were working OK but threw no useful light whatsoever. We had to follow the taillights of the preceding car, but of course they always accelerated away leaving us in the dark until someone overtook us to repeat the sequence.

Next day a 200 mile drive took us to meet the previous owner of the Tudor (we had only corresponded by phone and email up to this stage). We then took another ferry back onto the Canadian mainland and a thrash with the rush hour traffic of Vancouver on Highway Number 1 (for us it was rather like driving on the London Circular motorway, but in a foreign country, and of course for us- on the wrong side of the road.)

During the Vancouver thrash I notice the ammeter was showing no charge, but a judicious check at a pull off showed the fan belt was OK so we carried on to our hotel. Within an hour I had the generator off, the NuRex alternator (that I was carrying as a spare) fitted and the charging system running better than ever. Previously the ammeter had been showing the generator putting out a constant 10 amps which is too high, but shifting the third brush had had the effect of producing no charge at all or maxing out at 12 amps; I think someone had been there before me and had probably altered the internals of the generator. No worries. The generator had lasted us 1500 miles in this state, the alternator that is now fitted should be good for several decades and the battery had come to no harm.

We were now heading back eastwards towards the end of our trip when disaster struck. Climbing the Allison Pass from almost sea level. We had overtaken a lorry when our nemesis occurred; a loud screeching noise told me to pull immediately off the highway and switch off. I assumed a seized engine. “*Sorry, that sounds terminal*”, I said turning to Rita. On lifting the bonnet I was surprised to see a flood of water bubbling from the radiator overflow pipe.

Hmm, probably head gasket failed along with engine seizure. We let the car and ourselves cool down then topped up the rad with the gallon of water we were carrying... “*Might as well try it*”, I said and was gobsmacked to find the car started on the first attempt and sounded to be running OK. We very gently motored to the top of the pass and topped up the rad further with creek water, and eventually cruised to a camp site a few miles beyond. A night fretting had me convinced that just the head gasket had leaked on Allison Pass and the engine had suffered no damage, but despite the car now running OK, I was not prepared to risk using it through the steep mountain passes still ahead of us .

A phone call to the garage in the next town -Princeton, 60 miles away- had me asking very hesitantly *“I don’t know if you can help me, I have a 1930 Ford A with a blown head gasket.”* Imagine my reaction when the voice at the other end of the phone said *“Oh, you need to speak to our mechanic Tim – he sold his Model A last year – I’ll put him on now”*

A flatbed recovery truck took us to Tim’s garage and by the end of the next day Tim and I had a new head gasket fitted (on tour I always carry a complete set of gaskets). But what a struggle to get the head off! I could not possibly have done it without Tim’s professional help. How come the Model A head can be so stubborn? The incidental serendipity discovery was finding that the drive between the distributor and lower shaft was extremely rusted and it was merely a few microns away from the next roadside problem. Fortunately I was carrying not only a spare distributor but also a new lower shaft.



We were back on the road a couple of days behind schedule but still with time in hand and we continued driving through the intensely hot southern area of BC. By now we were setting off at 05.00 am each morning to avoid the worst of the heat. With the new head gasket fitted we encountered no more problems and on the final day did the longest day-mileage of our tour making 265 miles by departing at 05.00am, resting and cooling at top of Rogers Pass (1327m) for 30 minutes, ice cream stops whenever possible and with a final sweltering drive in the heat of mid-afternoon for the last 80 miles back to Sherry and Ian’s.

Number Crunching? Oil used- nil. Distance travelled- 2062 miles. Enforced stops 2. Flat tyres 1. “Second-gear” hills-countless. Mountains viewed- infinite. Road trip challenge rating for a vintage car – 10/10. Scenery rating- 11/10.

Morals of the story? None of the mechanical problems we encountered – flat tyre, restricted fuel line, generator failure, blown head gasket rusted distributor shaft would have shown up on any normal pre-purchase inspection or road test. The three morals of the trip have to be 1, Whatever Model A you buy you **will** encounter problems. 2, Whatever Model A you buy you **will** need to spend further money. 3, Whatever Model A you buy **always** carry spare parts when on tour.

Thank you Canada and all Canadians. Great trip; we are already looking forwards to our next visit!