



From the Garage

by Paul Hunter

As some of you know, we were on our way to the highway clean up when our coupe's engine began to pound. I'm not talking a valve clack, I'm talking a full on, Quasimodo pounding of the bells. Luckily, we were right at the George Washington exit, so we coasted off the ramp, and limped her home. I was sure it was a rod pounding, and waited for it to come crashing through the pan or the side of the block. But, luckily it didn't. We both breathed a huge sigh of relief when I shut her off in the garage. A couple of days later I dropped the pan expecting to see a total mess in the bottom end. There was nothing obvious staring at me. The good news in all of this was I discovered I had a counterweighted crank. I checked the pan and found babbitt in the pan baffle. When I looked more closely at the rod caps, I noticed chunks of babbitt missing from the thrust bearing surface on the sides of the caps. I pulled number one cap and it had problems inside the cap itself. When I pushed up the rod, the whole babbitt fell out in one piece. Not good. There were plenty of shims in the caps, so the babbitt was redone at some point. Number two rod had the babbitt coming loose in chunks and the cap was splintered. Number 3 rod had an extra hole in it and spider web cracks all around the hole.

I was convinced I had gotten a bad batch of babbitt. When I talked to people more knowledgeable than myself, they felt it was more likely a wrist pin causing the noise because the pounding was on acceleration, instead of deceleration. Now I had to sweat a groove in one of the cylinder walls. I had a friend over when I pushed out the pistons, and there was no problem with the pins nor the cylinder walls. I figured I could get away with a new set of rods and some rings, and put her back together. I spun the crank to make sure the mains felt okay, which they did. But, there was a strange clunking when the crank was turned. I asked my friend if he heard the clunk, and he had. Picking up the drop light, he had me move the crank back and forth while he checked the piston bores. Almost immediately he told me he saw the problem. I crawled out from under the car, took the light and checked number one bore. A blind man could have seen the problem. There was a crack in the crankshaft about an eighth of an inch wide, just behind the counterweight for number one rod. I pulled the engine from the car, and took it down to almost the bare block. When I finally got the main caps off, I was able to lift the crank out of the engine. Unfortunately, it was in two pieces. I don't know how we managed to drive it home. If it had splintered parallel to the crank center, I would have figured it held itself together with the edges of the break. But it was a clean break, as the picture shows. When I took the crank outside in the sun, the reason for the break became readily apparent. I'm not a machinist, but someone drilled the holes to balance the crank way too deep; through the center of the number one rod journal actually. Once again, the fickle finger of fate has struck. I bought the car with the engine "rebuilt." I'm sure it was, but who ever assembled it didn't care too much about the quality of their work. I'll be charitable and give them the benefit of the doubt - stuff happens. Even when you think you finally have everything covered, you don't. It's all part of the joys associated with owning old cars.



Reprinted from the Columbia Basin Model A Ford Car Club