

# Bewitched by Esmeralda



By Ed Hilbush

This is the story of Esmeralda, our 1935 Ford Four-door Convertible Sedan. As fate would have it, things fell into place when we bought her. In 1984, I worked with my father and our accountant Mr. Henry Sanville. Henry and I were talking old cars, and he wanted to fire up his old Ford. I indicated that I would be interested in buying the car if he wanted to sell it.

I had just painted a 1947 Ford Four-door Sedan. Our boys and I were driving it through Cheyney University when I suggested we look at Henry's old Ford. When we pulled into his driveway, Henry asked, "Come to get the old Ford?" He had not given me any notice.

The following day, I had a good friend show up with his tow truck, and he started to hook up Henry's car. Henry shouted,

"Stop. I can't sell the car! I have had it since it was new!" After some more discussion and pleading, we got to take the car home.

The following morning my wife Anne and I showed up at the title place with the check in hand to pay for the Ford. That's when I started to learn some of the vehicle's history.

Henry bought the automobile from a Philadelphia car dealer, and it was a salesman's car. As such, it came equipped with a heater, radio, Columbia rear, defroster, and leather seats. Ford built the car at the plant in Chester, Pennsylvania.

Henry drove the car every day until the Second World War. He enlisted in the Navy and was sent to the Pacific. Before Henry







*Left: Ed and Anne Hilbush's 1935 Ford Four-door Convertible Sedan at the Goshen Park, in West Chester, Pennsylvania.  
Below: Esmeralda arrives home after her purchase.*

#### 1935 Ford Four-door Convertible Sedan Specs:

- Total production: 4,234  
(total production for 1935—820,253)
- Rear wheel drive
- Original list price: \$750
- Engine: Flathead 8, L-head
- Bore and stroke: 3 1/16 x 3 3/4 inches
- Displacement: 221 cubic inches
- Braking horsepower: 85 at 3,800 rpm
- Carburetor: Stromberg EE-1, two-barrel downdraft
- Options available: Radio, heater, clock, cigar lighter, trunk, luggage rack, whitewalls, Greyhound hood ornament, special spoke wheels, bumper guards, dual-windshield wipers

(Source: *Standard Catalog of American Cars: 1805-1942*  
by Beverly Rae Kimes and Henry Austin Clark Jr.)



left, he put the car in his wife's name in case he did not return home.

Shortly after I brought the automobile home, I started to restore the Ford. He also told me if any parts were missing to look in his barn. He would often stop to pick parts as they fell off the car! As time passed, Henry often asked about its progress when he saw me at the office. I promised him that when I finished the restoration, he could take the car and treat his wife, Jane, to brunch. Tragically, Henry died in an automobile wreck a week before I finished. I vowed that I would take Jane to brunch one day.

Right before the I completed the restoration, I made a date with Jane. When I showed up, there were tears in her eyes.

She asked, "Wasn't the car black?" I replied, "Well, yes. But my wife is partial to blue. So blue it is." Then the ultimate blow to my ego came when Jane quipped, "No offense, but the car was quieter when Henry owned it."

During the 40 years Anne and I have owned the car, we have used it for many weddings, parades, and graduations. She is also our Glidden Tour car. We named her Esmeralda, after the vampire slayer.

A good friend asked me to take her parents for a ride to celebrate their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. As we rode along, her dad, Mr. Sharon asked if I knew where the car had been manufactured. I replied, "At the Chester Ford Plant."







Five pictures show various stages of Esmeralda's restoration from the beginning. Bottom right: Her restored dash clock.







*Esmeralda shines in the early spring sun.*

He smiled and said, "I probably helped to assemble this car!" His poor wife might as well not have been in the Ford because all Mr. Sharon and I talked about was the Chester Assembly Plant.

Our 1935 Ford has always been a Pennsylvania car. We are the second owner of this 90-year-old automobile. This begins the 40<sup>th</sup> year that we have been Esmeralda's caretaker. Anne and I have been on many tours and participated in a slew of weddings with her. We had to discontinue driving her in weddings since we discovered our insurance would be null and void if we provided "livery services."

Anne enjoys driving Esmeralda as much as I do. I will recount a humorous incident with her driving it. During a local Christmas parade many years ago, I promised PA State Representative Elinor Taylor a ride in our 1935 Ford with Anne as the driver. I had already made plans to drive our Model T with the parade marshal. During the parade, the marshal and I followed the honor guard. At one point, I heard the unmistakable roar of our 1935 Ford's flat-head eight! Anne had drag-raced the mayor's brother, who drove a Model A with the mayor as a passenger. After the parade, I asked Anne what she thought she was doing. Anne replied that Elinor had smacked her on the head and told her to, "Hit it, girl! I am not following the mayor!"

We have had the Ford on at least seven Glidden Tours and they all had their own special memories. It is difficult to pick one that stands out, but I will relate a event that happened during the Rock Hill Glidden.

A national director needed to hitch rides during the tour, so Anne and I offered him a seat in the Ford with one rule. Nobody rides for free. Thus, he became our navigator for the day with only one rule, "Don't get us lost." The day was scorching hot and by late afternoon I stopped driving and declared we could follow the directions back to the hotel and air conditioning (which would take 20 or so minutes) or I could jump on the freeway and be back in half the time or less. Our passenger asked, "Aren't you afraid of being rear ended?" What a foolish question to ask! I hit the freeway and was in high range keeping up with traffic. Ten minutes later we were having cool drinks back at the hotel. This gave me just enough time to tune my banjo and meet Bill Johnson as we were part of the Glidden Band. Esmeralda did not let us down.

Esmeralda is starting to show her age and could use another restoration. We have been through so much together, and I want to keep her the way she is. It was love at first sight.

*(Photos by Ed Hilbush and Tracy Leshner)*

