

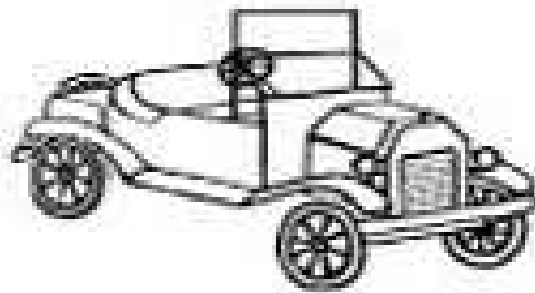


## Wild Elephants

by Lavern Larson, Roland's brother

If that old Ford stripdown could talk, the complaints would be a long impressive story. In the first place, that little old Ford seemed to squawk every time we called it an automobile. And then at other times when we thoughtlessly called it flivver, it appeared to resent it, kick back and refuse to start. Tinlizzie seemed to be the favored name when addressing the stripdown. And it had a right to be proud, as it was replacing the donkey in the field of convenient transportation.

Actually, in the early 1920s, anyone living on Live Oak Hill owning even a tinlizzie stripdown was considered to be one of the greats.



My brother Roland coddled that old hunk of junk with tender care, admiration and a touch of fear, because if the stripdown refused to operate, his only alternative was to hike across the fields to where he worked.

In those days this cherished Model T Ford stripdown was worth no more than 50 dollars in gold. Even so, that was too much when taken into consideration there were no fenders nor windshield. To start the motor, there was a crank at the front end which quite often kicked backwards, sometimes to break an arm. And even with all its misunderstood qualities and negative marks, it had four wheels and a steering apparatus, and it did prove to be a blessing most of the time. That is, it was somewhat faster than a burro or walking.

Notwithstanding all its rare features of rapture and shabby appearance, this simple contraption of conveyance was a constant temptation to my better judgement. And inasmuch as my brother slept in the daytime when he was working the graveyard shift, he always left his pride and joy parked by the side of the house. and on this particular morning I was overpowered by a great desire to hop in and drive that little go-cart away. But it was not that simple. The road was narrow and steep, and came to a dead end within fifty yards from our house. And at the dead end was a short U-turn which had to be made. Otherwise, it was two hundred and fifty feet to the bottom of the canyon.

After about thirty minutes of wishful thinking, my anxious glands became activated enough to remove the large rock from in front of a wheel and hop into the driver's seat, and then away we went down the steep road. But I soon found that the brakes were no good. Quickly I tried the reverse clutch and found it was slipping and failed as a brake. We were right at the dead end now and something had to be done fast. There was far too much speed to make the turn. Therefore my instant judgement was to jump out and sort of pray for luck while my poor brother's dream boat shot off down toward the bottom of the hill. Fortunately at about forty feet down, the stripdown lodged in some growth of thick manzanita and scrub oak, right side up and on all fours.

I had created a problem and was in painful trouble now. What should I do? My brother would soon be rising from

his sleep. And when he discovered that bag of tin was gone, he would be like a wild man. But my strategy, though a wee bit sneaky, and was to try to be absent when the critical moment of revelation arrived. And when I did return to the scene of the calamity, my brother and a good neighbor with his car was towing the stripdow back up to the road. And to my surprise my brother was quite cool; and the lack of casting threats of destruction toward my well being, caused my bosom to fill with emotions of adoration for my brother.

And then after the little old flivver had been fully recovered, it appeared not to be afflicted with any new ailments, Roland seemed to be jolly well pleased and somewhat brotherly again.

Soon after this unpleasant episode Roland and I ventured to take a tour up to the Gila Valley. Our goal being Glenbar, where my sister Cora lived on a farm with her husband Floyd Mack. And of special interest is the fact that this small town is our homeland - our birthplace.

It was in August. The summer rains had been pouring down, adding to the misery of the trip. As the stripdow didn't have a windshield, our faces were exposed to the wind and bugs of all descriptions. Though top speed was about twenty-five miles per hour, it was no less than torture to ride that way for eighty miles. On top of all the other small discomforts, the old Model T had a mysterious sickness in the steering mechanism which furnished a bit of comedy sometimes, as well as frustration.

At this one particular time as we were passing a good sized pond of rain water by the roadside, the old flivver had one of its steering spells. It chose to turn off to the left and run right through the middle of the pond, throwing water right and left and all over us. All we could do was ride it through and hope for the best. Of course it was a miracle that the motor didn't drown out.

To be realistic, it was so funny. we came out the other side of the pond laughing but plenty mad. We were wet and excited, but the flivver moved right along and we managed to get back on the highway without a stop. And we never did know what caused the steering default or what fixed it. And strange it was indeed, this was the only spell the flivver had during the entire trip. And after the kiss of a million bugs upon our faces, our destination was reached.

We met with mystery and rare excitement on the return trip home. It was on the Apache Indian Reservation when the unexpected scare came our way. We had stopped at the Gila River Bridge to eat some cookies and ice cream that our good sister had prepared for us. The place we stopped was hemmed in by groves of huge black mequites too thick to see through.

We were quietly nibbling on some cookies, and preparing to dig in to the ice cream when the peaceful silence was broken by a blood curdling roar from out in the mesquites. We could see nothing out there, but it was a terrible noise, a sound that I didn't recognize. I think my hair stood straight up. And when we looked at each other, it appeared that my brothers face was turning green. Again, another roar similar to the first gave us chills. My brother jumped into the drivers seat and said, "Sounds like wild elephants! Get in quick, let's get out of here!"

"Don't we have to crank it first?" I shouted.

"Yeah. Hurry. That thing is coming this way!" he fairly screamed as he pulled the gas and spark controls all the way down.

Half scared to death I grabbed that crank and tried to spin it. But too much spark caused it to kick back taking my thumb with it. While I held my thumb and said a lot of nasty words, Roland reduced the spark, jumped out and gave the crank a quick jerk, and then things began to happen. The motor started up. The vehicle moved forward pushing Roland against a tree, while at the same moment another roar from the thicket plus a smashing, crashing limb busting noise. It sounded like an invasion of the wild animal kingdom. We thought our time had come for sure, and it seemed impossible for us to get that old flivver turned around and out on the road.

Just at the time when we thought all was lost, three large bulls with long horns and one cow came busting out of the haunted mesquite forest. The bulls came out pawing the earth and fighting. We soon found that the bulls were not after us at all, and all the roaring and fighting was to prove to the cow which of the bulls was king of the range.

Well. Well. We breathed a sigh of relief. Ice cream never tasted so good, and two brothers never had such a scare and lived to tell it. And then we nearly died laughing.

