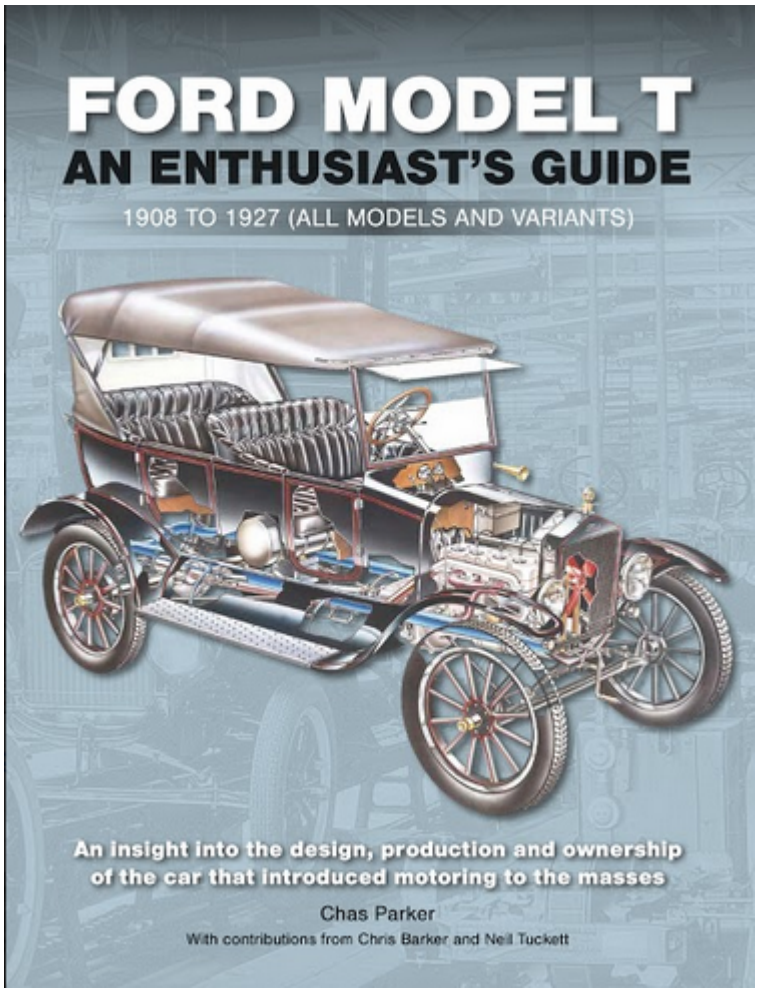
For Your Bookshelf – “Ford Model T – An Enthusiast’s Guide” (1908 to 1927, all models and variants)

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Reviewed by Kim Henson

Author: Chas Parker (with contributions from Chris Barker and Neil Tuckett)

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Long-standing readers of Wheels-Alive may have noticed that I love reading most motoring books, although they may not all appreciate that when writing a book review, I like to make it my business to read every page before giving my opinion…

In the case of the latest volume to come my way for review, ‘Ford Model T – An Enthusiast’s Guide – this was certainly no hardship, for I spent many enjoyable late nights drinking in all the information provided within this book’s 160 fascinating pages.



A page view showing contemporary shots of Model Ts on the production line.

It covers every aspect of the Model T in well-written text, lavishly illustrated with, and complemented by, more than 220 superb images, including line drawings and photographs (incorporating a wealth of excellent contemporary shots) covering the cars from inception, through production and in use in the 21st Century.

The history behind the car and how Henry Ford developed his idea, making it a huge sales success, is covered in detail, and includes many facts of which I was previously unaware.



Model T factory views… A double page spread from the book and showing the huge production facilities.

I like the way that the book is divided into separate, logically set out sections that are easy to read.

Fully covered in-depth is the story of the model, the ‘anatomy’ of it, detailed information on how the car was built, how it operates and how to drive it, an engineer’s view, the opinions of owners, the Model T’s competition history, the varieties available, restoration aspects and – one of my favourite sections – ‘Adventures’ with the cars, past and present-day.

I don’t want to spoil the pleasure that other motoring enthusiasts will doubtless get from this book (even if they don’t own a Model T or even if they are not Ford fans as such), but will highlight just a few fascinating facts that I discovered by reading it…

I was previously unaware of the widespread use throughout the vehicle of vanadium steel

and other very high quality materials, no doubt helping the cars survive well.

I was impressed by the enthusiasm of many owners mentioned in this book, for actually using the cars, which is wonderful for a model that was last produced in 1927.

It is cheering to note that parts needed to keep a Model T on the road are still widely available (and notably, for owners in Britain, through a few specialist suppliers in the U.K.), and the cars are far more practical to drive, own and run, than might be imagined.

It is well known that more than 15 million Model Ts were produced between 1908 and 1927, and that Henry Ford set up mass production assembly processes to enable such a staggeringly high figure to be reached.

The book advises that the pinnacle of Model Ts came in the early 1920s, and, for example, in 1921 Ford held a 60 per cent share of the U.S.A. car market, also in 1923 some 1.8 million examples were sold…

While it may be thought that the watchword for the Model T was ‘simplicity’ (and indeed the cars were deliberately straightforward to drive and to look after, anywhere, by virtually anyone), they were very cleverly-designed vehicles and in many aspects remarkably sophisticated.

The book explains that the way in which the chassis was designed and the mechanical components were mounted, ensured that the vehicle could cope with all sorts of terrain, including rough roads (or indeed none!), as often existed when the car was conceived more than 110 years ago…

On a personal level, through the kindness of a Model T owner (thanks again Pat!) I was fortunate enough to be able to drive one of these amazing vehicles a few years ago, for several miles. I have also had the pleasure of driving a preserved Model T from Ford U.K.’s own classic collection. In each case the experience cheered me immensely and while the techniques required are rather different when compared with virtually every other classic

model, they are soon acquired. These techniques (and the mechanical construction of the vehicle requiring them) were logical in the context of producing a vehicle that could be driven anywhere by anyone, as required in the early years of motoring in the U.S.A. and around the world.

It is interesting to me that the pedal control of the transmission, and the two speed epicyclic transmission, works so well, and with the exception of having to use low gear to move off from a standstill, the high ratio enables the car to pull happily and well from around walking pace up to the car's maximum of just over 40 mph.

VERDICT

A terrific book, which I very much enjoyed. It is well-written, and has been produced by Chas Barker and others who know the Model Ts well and who love them, but who also write about the vehicles with honesty, rather than just seeing them through rose-tinted spectacles.

The wealth of superbly-reproduced photographs and diagrams, including early shots of the cars and the factories, plus Model Ts being used in their heyday and in the 21st Century, is wonderful to see. I spent a long time looking at these image, each one capturing a moment so wonderfully!

I can fully see the appeal of the cars, and whether or not you are an owner or intend to buy one, if you are interested in motoring and history, this book should definitely be on your bookshelf!