

Driving History

By Bob Schmeichel

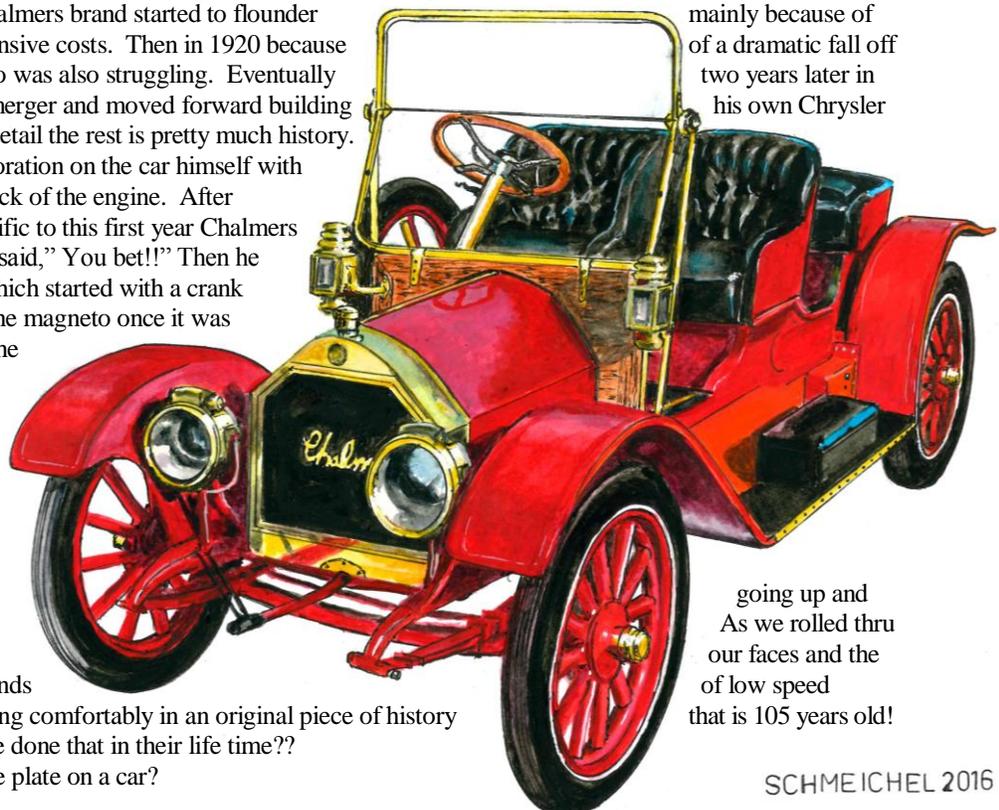
As far back as Larry Snuttjer could remember while growing up on a farm, he always had an interest in anything mechanical and how it worked. His evolution from farm machinery to old cars happened one summer day when a great aunt drove her Model T out to their farm to visit. It wasn't a fancy car by any means to drive around in, but simple enough to get his attention and then put a smile on his face with understanding the basic mechanics of how everything worked together. From that point on his infatuation grew with old cars right up to today and has never stopped. Early on with Larry was always eager to test his own mechanical abilities, so around the age of 21 he bought his first old car in 1968 from his brother, which was a 1929 Ford Model A coupe. After having it for awhile he sold it in favor of his next project, an older 1914 Buick. After he had the Buick for a number of years he felt like he was losing interest and later started thinking about getting out of the earlier car picture. So eventually the Buick was sold, only to lead him



back to another old car, a 1938 Packard. The Packard would eventually lead Larry to get into the street rodding scene in the 1970's. Having the old car look on the outside with a late model drive train underneath seemed to have a pretty strong appeal. So without going into too much detail you can start to see a pattern of the different directions that old cars have pulled Larry in earlier years.

With that let's fast forward, well maybe not too fast with these old cars, to December of 2006. While visiting a car buddy in Colorado Springs, Larry noticed a totally complete unrestored 1911 Chalmers "30" roadster in the back corner of his buddy's building. Since his buddy was working on another car project, Larry questioned him about his intent with the Chalmers only to hear him say he was thinking about selling it to fund his other car build. A deal was made and Larry was taking it home with him the next day. Larry was really excited about getting his fingers into rebuilding this older brass era car which grew on him more as he researched and found out further information about what he had. As Larry was telling me about the car it became a unique history lesson about the short 10 to 12 year lifespan of the Chalmers car brand. It was started by Hugh Chalmers who was the CEO of the National Cash Register Company to begin with. Anyone who is into antiques knows of these big old original brass cash registers that were built by his company and widely used in the 1800's and 1900's all over the country. Larry clarified that the Chalmers auto brand was no relation to the Allis Chalmers Tractors which I am sure could always be a lingering question. Hugh Chalmers bought out the Thomas Detroit Motor company in 1908 with intentions of getting into the car business. Then in 1910, Hugh put his own name on the business with his own ideas to improve cars. Hugh's intent with building a car was to be a fancier, better riding, touring vehicle with a more powerful engine. When they actually started producing Chalmers cars in 1911 they had an edge on the market with two different roller bearing spun crankshaft engines available, a thirty horsepower and a forty horsepower version with a 3 speed transmission offered in seven different body styles. Prices for the different models varied greatly from \$1,500 to \$2,750 based on engine size and body type. Considering a person could buy a new Model T Ford even with any of the different body types during the same time frame for \$300 to \$400, the Chalmers was considered an expensive car for the elite. After 6 or 8 years with more brands of cars being introduced into the picture, the Chalmers brand started to flounder their low production numbers and more expensive costs. Then in 1920 because in sales, Chalmers merged with Maxwell who was also struggling. Eventually 1922, Walter P. Chrysler bought the failing merger and moved forward building brand cars. Without getting into the further detail the rest is pretty much history.

Larry proudly told me he did all the restoration on the car himself with the exception of the machine work on the block of the engine. After showing me all the little unique features specific to this first year Chalmers car, he asked me if I'd like to go for a ride? I said, "You bet!!" Then he went thru the motions of getting it running which started with a crank while using a distributor and switching it to the magneto once it was idling. We climbed and I watched as he set the spark advance and idle on the steering wheel levers till it idled smoothly. He then pushed in the clutch pedal 1/2 ways, which is actually the brake pedal too (when depressed further to the floor to hold the car) and slipped it into gear. Starting out from the back side of Larry's house is a pretty good 30 degree incline that the Chalmers had no problem out onto the road around his neighborhood. the area with a slight breeze blowing in car doing what it was designed for with all kinds lugging power, I really felt honored to be riding comfortably in an original piece of history How many people can honestly say they have done that in their life time?? Have you ever seen an original leather license plate on a car?



mainly because of
of a dramatic fall off
two years later in
his own Chrysler

going up and
As we rolled thru
our faces and the
of low speed
that is 105 years old!