

The Doodle Bug

Our Doodlebug was probably more of a truck than a Doodlebug in a way, but it incorporated the idea of using old car parts that still had life to be utilized after the cars weren't worth repairing for road use. I believe ours started as a Chrysler sedan with its body cut away a few inches above the floor boards. The seats were removed to allow for two transmissions to be installed, the second one attached to the rear of the original. This was done to give the truck its low-low or creeper gear when both were put into reverse. Pa also locked the rear axle together somehow creating kind of a crude positraction. Because there wasn't room for regular seats he bolted two sturdy packing crates, one on each side of the second transmission. He secured a seat pad on each. I'm not sure whether he shortened the driveshaft or extended the frame to accommodate the extra transmission, me being only four years old at the time. His next step was to replace the rear springs with six-by-eight inch oak timbers which he hewed to fit before building the flatbed body with a headboard just behind the seats. The gas tank had to be removed to accommodate all of this. His solution to this was a bracket on the fire wall that held a two-gallon can with a rubber hose going through the cap into the can. It was fitted loosely enough to allow removal of the two-gallon can from the truck to be refilled. This hose went down to the fuel pump. Now all this may seem unsafe, but I watched that truck haul tons and tons of hay, dirt, logs, etc... without any problem.

I just loved riding in this doorless wonder in the passenger "seat" watching the ground flyby. I heard my brothers talking about hooking a chain to the rear of it and then to a large maple, then putting it into creeper gear and lifting the front tires six-feet off the ground before chickening out. Now I did not witness this but it sounds like the work of the youngest of my older brothers Ernie. One trick I did witness of my brothers was with our roadworthy Rio truck that Pa used to deliver cordwood, get apples for cider, etc... Even though we had our own orchard we went to Coveys orchard in Burlington and even sometimes all the way to New York State to get enough to make hard cider and Applejack for the Tavern. Anyway when the Rio was parked on the entry ramp to the hayloft he would remove three of the four plug wires, then let it roll, pop the clutch, and it would roar to life. He then would go to the bottom of the hill and show his friends how it would climb the hill running on just one cylinder. Needless to say he never did it when Pa was around. The truck lasted a good long time so I guess it was not all that harmful to it. Ernie could always get away with a little more than Frank and Richie partly because he'd had Rheumatic Fever and a problem with neck muscles. (His head hung to one side until he was ten,) And he was very puny. My mother fed him a rich diet and by the time he was thirteen he was already pretty sturdy, but I think his progress was more due to Ernie's constant motion building him up. The other reason Pa was easy on him is that Ernie had a magic touch with a team of horses. Even when he was a skinny and an anemic kid he could handle a team of horses with ease. I think our horses could sense the impatience in my father's voice and didn't pull well together sometimes. If Ernie was around, Pa would

call him and as if by magic when Ernie took the reins the team would go well with a heavy load. It's funny but the different teams would work well for Pa until the load was heavy and then Ernie would have to take over.