For those who don’t know it, the Ford Motor Company discontinued production of the Model T Ford in May 1927. It wasn’t until December 2, 1927 that the Model A was released.

When the Ford Motor Company finally set out to introduce the “New Ford,” later named the “Model A Ford” it was careful. Ford’s plan to enable the widespread announcement and sale of the car on December 2, 1927 fell short of its intended goals. To make this many deliveries from absolutely zero stock was a massive undertaking. Here are a few tales of the introduction of the New Model A Ford.

First, the idea of having a new Ford available at every dealership was a weak concept nationwide. Many dealerships went months without a car to show and demonstrate. For dealers who had gone without cars since the mid-May stoppage of Model T production, this was truly a rough time to stay in business. Still, some dealers fought to stay in the automobile business. The public response for the new Model A was overwhelming. People would do the darndest things to see and get a hold of the new Ford. Public interest had never been higher for a new product.

Ford’s main production plant was the River Rouge (Fordson) plant. In converting it to produce the Model A, plans were made to produce and overhaul some 34 other assembly plants in the United States and Canada. There were also a reported 12 factories overseas plus numerous shops of independent
outside suppliers. Before the end of Model A production, there were 36 domestic (including Canada) plus 17 other plants overseas that assembled Model A's and individual parts for the cars.

One of the important actions was the official hand stamping of Model A Ford engine Number 1, on October 20, 1927. Henry Ford stamped that engine himself. The very next day that engine was installed into a Tudor sedan body. Then the car was sent out from Dearborn Laboratories for 10 days of testing and inspection. During this timeframe Ford's assembly lines were non-operational – waiting for results. Then on November 1, 1927, news went out to start Model A production. At that time production was slow with new Ford's coming off the Dearborn assembly line at a rate of just 20 per day.

Here in Kansas City, like many other larger districts, the new cars were placed in a large public area - in this case, it was at the Kansas City Convention Hall. Shown were the Tudor sedan, Fordor sedan, Roadster, Coupe, Sport Coupe, and the Phaeton. This display of six vehicles demonstrated the new Ford's style, performance and pricing. Dealers had only photographs and other printed materials to show their customers at their own dealerships initially. Hence, with just six cars and hundreds of willing buyers, the rush was on to get one.

The large photo shown on page 24-25 is a 1928 Ford Tudor. It is supposed to be the first Model A delivered in the Kansas City area. The handsome fellow in the middle of the three men is Harry S. Truman, who would become the 34th President of the United States. On this day, he was a younger Jackson County Commissioner. The other two men are not identified, despite our best efforts. Take time to study their correct business suits.

Trying to relive the birth of the Model A Ford is a monster project for even a magazine like The Restorer. The details are many more than can be related in this magazine. In my opinion, one of the best publications to cover the topic is titled “The Legendary Model A Ford” by Peter Winnewisser. This book is invaluable to any serious Model A collector and covers the entire production of the Model A. In that book Peter said, “H. C. Doss, manager of the Kansas City Branch, said that he visited every one of his 521 dealers, covering 30,000 miles in about six months. He kept the dealers sold on Ford and what Ford had and would have. He talked to bankers about loans, helped dealers build up their service departments and found ways to encourage them to get rid of non-productive relatives on their payrolls. The result was that he did not lose one dealer because there were no cars to sell.”

By late November 1927, each dealer received a portfolio, titled “Introduction of the New Ford Car,” with general instructions for the many procedures they were to follow in presenting cars to the public when they became available. They also received a large box containing window posters, banners, showroom display cards, car illustrations and color pictures of the cars. Toward the end of November, branches notified dealers of the location of new car exhibits. Some 2,000 sets of these instructions were produced and one sent to each dealership. All were laden with instructions that the information contained inside was confidential.

The size was something different, too. Each page was measured at 13” wide by 18” tall. There were 26 pages. So there isn’t any chance of reprinting them exactly in The Restorer. However, we’ve reduced them so you can get a feel for the text project. I’m told that three complete sets of this portfolio survive. The one provided here is from our Model A friend, Howard Minners, Bethesda, Maryland.

Crowds were so heavy in Cincinnati that many were turned away, yet total attendance for the day was 296,475. These figures were easily exceeded by Chicago with 514,096 people the first day, and the Kansas City territory, where 651,000 people saw the new car. In the St. Paul territory, cars arrived at the
branch the night before the first showing. Some of these then had to be driven as much as 200 miles to their destination in spite of a raging blizzard and a temperature of 18-below-zero. All the cars arrived on time and showed remarkable performance in traveling over snow-drifted roads.

_Time_ magazine told about one enterprising rascal who took advantage of the crowds and filed along through the crowd with his “order book” in hand. He took orders from those willing to give him the $25 deposit required. He finally ran away with who knows how many $25 stuffed into his pockets.

“It’s history - what a tremendous reception the Model A had,” said C. W. Doss. “In Kansas City they literally broke the doors down to get in before it was time to open to the public. They pushed them right through. You couldn’t control that mob. There will never be another introduction like that; never was before. That was the story all over the country. It was tremendous, fabulous. The advance orders on that car were tremendous. They just ran over you to get one.”

2,250 cars were sold the day of announcement (December 2, 1927) at Convention Hall. 24,000 people attended the exhibit on Friday and Saturday.

The story of the two Truman photos (one they are wearing their hats and other without them) goes like this. Found long after Mr. Truman’s death at the Harry S. Truman Library was a personal desk that belonged to Mr. Truman. It had a side credenza that was locked and the key was long lost. Sometime later, workers opened the credenza and found the photos. One had the business card of E. C. Reppert, President, Kelley-Reppert Motor Company attached to it. Kelley-Reppert was one of the largest Ford dealers anywhere during the time. Their building still stands at 422 Admiral Street in Kansas City. The building has been added to the National Historical Registry, but still maintains many of the original features used by Kelley-Reppert.
The photographs with Harry S. Truman and the new Tudor appear to be taken at the Kansas City Ford Plant, 1926 Winchester Ave. It still stands, but today is used for a variety of other storage and manufacturing needs. The only mark of Ford are the letters that still are engraved on the large chimneys.

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Even small-time dealers, like Arbuthnot Motor Company, paid close attention to Ford Motor Company’s instructions. Here the first Model A arrived on December 13 after a wait since December 2 for display. Still the dealership followed many of the instructions set forth in the Introductions for Sale of the New Ford. Here we see Ford provided signage and pricing. Also, the dealer installed temporary wooden barriers to keep all but the most serious lookers from touching the car. One sign on the wall reads: “Orders will be filled strictly in the order received.”

In Crockett, Texas, Daniel T. Lemay, owner of the Crockett Filling Station bought a new Ford AA Truck on January 17, 1928. But it appears that delivery of his truck didn’t happen until August 6, 1928. Getting the backlog filled was no small task for Ford.
Will Rogers was one of the most famous Americans at the time the Model A came out. Many say the first of all the Model A’s went to Thomas Edison. However, not everyone can agree that the first Model A went to Edison. For an example, an article in the Ford Dealer & Service Field (March 31, 1931) about movie stars and Ford cars, claims the Beverly Hills Motor Inc., of Beverly Hills, California, delivered the first Model A in the United States to world-famous humorist Will Rogers.

The statement is backed by a telegram, dated December 22, 1927, from Will Rogers and quoted by David Lewis in his column in Cars & Parts (October 1981). “Got the car and the first time I have stopped is to write this telegram,” it says. “Tell your dad it’s my first bribe. But it runs so good it eases my conscience. Proud to have delivery of the first of the second fifteenth million. Next to an airplane, it’s the best thing...”
PAGE 2 – A large and current photograph of Henry Ford.

PAGE 3 – Important text from Henry Ford. Read it well to understand how the car has survived. Also, note the final paragraph about advertising. Ford was not a big fan of using advertising in the 1920’s, but must have seen the light with the introduction of the new Ford. Both Ford and the dealers are encouraged to advertise.

PAGE 4 – Close Co-Operation Needed. “This first showing cannot be handled haphazardly. It will not be the great event it has the right to be if one Ford dealer does one thing and another Ford dealer does another. There must be team-work. There must be co-ordination. There must be close co-operation.

On the following pages of this portfolio, we are given the complete details of the program we want Ford dealers to follow. This program has been worked out with great care. It has been planned with just one idea in view – to help you sell more Ford cars.”

PAGES 5-7 – Here’s three pages of dated showroom keys to make your plan successful. Tips about window decorations, picking out a man to give the demonstration talk, plan to get prospect’s names when they call, put up poster No. 30 in your window, sustain interest by completely covering your windows, invite your present customers and prospects to your official introduction show, make arrangements with your newspaper for your own advertising, be sure your salesmen know every detail of the new Ford car, November 28 - December 2: hang out Ford full-page advertisements in the window, cut out your newspaper ads, be sure every prospect gets a booklet, be sure to display pictures of all types, show the specification chart in a prominent place, use these signs to advertise the features of the new car, place our fifth full-page advertisement in your window.
PAGE 8 – A Sample Letter. Use this letter to invite your present customers and prospects to your showroom Friday, December 2.

PAGE 9-11 – How to arrange your showrooms to the best advantage for your introduction show.

PAGE 12-13 – Samples of showroom signs that will be mailed to you.

PAGE 14-15 – Product information about the six initial body styles.

PAGE 16 – Prospect list building and “The Story of the New Ford Car” booklet. “Please put these booklets in a safe place and do not bring them
out until Friday, Dec. 2. Under no circumstances are these booklets to be distributed before that day.”

PAGES 17-19 – This is the demonstration lecture to be delivered on Friday, Dec 2, the day the car is introduced.

PAGE 20-25 – Tie up with the full-page advertising placed by the Ford Motor Company. Many sample ads and sizes for your dealership.

PAGE 26-27 – Special suggestions for announcement when you get a new Ford car to show. Not every dealer will have a new Ford car to
show on Dec 2. This letter helps you with that. “Observe This Rule to the Letter. If you do not have a car to show, do not tell the public that they can see the car at your showrooms on the day of the official introduction. Tell them to visit your showrooms “for full details” or the “full story” but do not say they can see the car. We insist that this rule be followed because we do not want to mislead the public in any way.”

Armed with these instructions and a truly great small car, the Model A Ford was set to score some massive records. It became one of the most popular cars ever and even today it survives like no other.

Franklin D. Roosevelt and his Model A Cabriolet. Roosevelt was governor of New York state at the time. To our knowledge only Presidents Roosevelt and Truman had any involvement with the Model A Ford. Photo courtesy of Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum.