

Frank Hawkes' 1936 Ford Cabriolet

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Rescued From The Bottom of The Thames River: Frank Hawkes' 1936 Ford Cabriolet





When you talk to Frank Hawkes about the time back in 1965 when a young boy was doing donuts (driving in circles around his backyard) that fronted on the Thames River and how the boy lost control on an incline causing the car to flip and roll down the embankment and splash into the river... Well.. you say...lucky that the boy wasn't hurt but too bad about the car. The car was a 1936 Ford cabriolet with a rumble seat. Who would have thought that a wonderful 30's classic icon should meet such an ignominious end. Off the car went, deeper into the channel and down, down she slipped, slowly, with bubbles a-poppin'...gone... never to be seen again.



But this car and this story did not end here. No sir. For out of the blue in 1974 came an unlikely hero. Just a plain spoken fellow named Frank Hawkes who worked hard for his money. A guy who was asked to come help clear the channel of debris and save the home owner the cost of doing it himself. Now, Frank is not your ordinary back hoe operator. The son of a surgeon in the British army during WW II, Frank's dad was posted to many different countries after the war, working with victims of bomb disposal squads and innocent civilians injured by delayed ordnance explosions. As a result Frank lived and went to school in many different western European countries. He emigrated to Canada in 1965 after obtaining a degree in Chemistry from Oxford University in England. Just about the same time as the kid was doing donuts with the 36 Ford in his backyard.

Fast forward nearly 10 years later and Frank hears about an old car that needs to be towed out of the river near Thamesville. The property owner knew exactly where the car was submerged. Frank and the owner paddled out about 20 feet into the river using a small canoe. Noticing that the embankment was not very steep, Frank decided he would pull the





car from the river using his van instead of his backhoe. On Easter Sunday, 1974 Frank dove down into the murky water and groping about, managed to tie a rope onto the hulk buried upside down on the muddy river bottom. Out of breath, our man resurfaced, shivering with teeth chattering from the cold. Long story short, Frank secured the tow rope to his van, and after much frenzy, the 36 Ford began to rise from its watery grave, lurch by lurch, ever so slowly. Frank drove home, got his trailer and loaded up his surprise find . Bad as it looked, this was a 36 Ford cabriolet and Frank thought that he could bring this baby back to life.

Frank cleaned all the mud from the car.. None of the glass was broken and all the clamps and hardware for the convertible top were intact. The soft top fabric had rotted away but all the top irons, oak wood, and folding mechanism were still there. Even the dash gauges were re-usable. Frank found a worm living inside the speedometer, the same one used on the car today. And the owner's manual, which was wrapped in plastic, was dry and perfectly preserved. The tires still had air in them. Can you believe it?

Five years later, Frank had finished a total restoration of this magnificent automobile. The original powertrain along with many of the other mechanical parts were refurbished and re-used to make this car a wonder to behold. The body held up surprisingly well and it was all sanded down to bare metal, primed and repainted.

I have trouble lubricating my car's door hinges and Frank Hawkes resurrects from the dead, on Easter Sunday 1974 what would become a class winner at the prestigious Meadow Brook Concours d'Elegance in Oakland Hills Michigan. What can I say? His flawless 1936 full classic Ford cabriolet would have made even Henry Ford himself beam with pride and delight over how indestructible this V8 beauty really was. And of course we are all oh so proud of Frank and what he accomplished. Well done ole man. Well done indeed.

Come on out and visit with Frank and his car at our new 50's Diner at the Canadian Transportation Museum.

Mickey Moulder

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