# “Change the Condenser”

**by Tom Endy**

On most any Model A tour one of the participating cars will likely drift to the side of the road inoperative. Soon after everyone gathers around someone in the crowd will surely yell out “change the condenser”. This knee-jerk reaction has become ingrained in Model A folklore. The truth is that good quality condensers available today seldom ever fail.

Over the years I have seen countless numbers of condensers changed out, but I have only observed one that actually failed, and that was because the ground strap soldered onto the back of the condenser came loose due to an over-heated engine.

The common practice for checking a condenser is to use an ohm meter. It will tell you if it is shorted or open, but not what the actual capacitance value is.

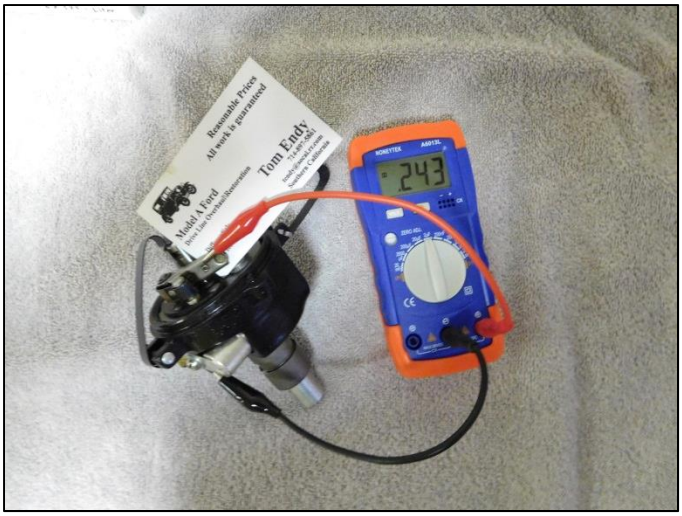



**A Honeytek A6013L Capacitor Tester (called a condenser in automotive jargon) is available through Amazon for about $17. The tester will tell you not only if the condenser is good or bad, but the actual value in micro-farads.**

What I have discovered with my new Honeytek tester is that the good quality condensers from Bratton’s test out at a nominal .243 micro farads.

I have never seen any documentation that Henry ever recorded about how many farads (or portions thereof) are required of a condenser to properly operate a Model A Ford ignition system.

It is difficult to describe what a farad is, especially when only a very small portion of one is used in a Model A condenser. A micro farad is but .000001 of one farad




The Honeytek tester is a unique thing to have along on a tour. You can easily test a condenser while it is still attached to a distributor installed in a Model A. Simply remove the car’s fuse, and slip a business card between the points. The plus lead of the tester is clipped to the arm of the points; the negative lead is clipped to ground on the distributor.

There are still poor quality condensers being sold by some suppliers. They are easily identified by the ground strap being soldered to the end of the condenser. The good quality ones sold by Bratton’s and a few other suppliers will show three little dots on the strap indicating they are stake welded on.



**On the left is a good quality Bratton’s condenser. On the right is a poor quality condenser still being sold by some suppliers.**