# Restoration of the Model 'A' Pickup Narrow Bed
## Hints, Shortcuts & Tricks

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My 1930 Model A closed cab pickup came out of rural Tennessee. The truck had been a farm truck and the bed was used hard. There were many rusted through areas in the bottom and too many dents to count, but the good news is that it was not bent out of shape like you would see if it had been wrecked. There were several items that needed replacing. They were the tailgate chains and hooks, one chain bracket that rivets to the bed that connects the chain, the flat sheet metal cover to the rear 'U' channel, a new tailgate, and last, the front bed panel. My front bed panel was rusted out all along the bottom where it meets the bottom of the bed so I opted for a replacement front panel. The only problem with the reproduction panel was the upper brackets that connect the top of the panel to the top of the bed on either side. The simple solution was to remove the reproduction brackets and rivet my original brackets to the new panel. This made all the original rivet holes on the side of the bed line up. As for the tailgate it was money well spent. Of all the reproduction items available for the Model 'A' this is one that is as close to the original as you will find. I still have my original tailgate and someday may attempt to straighten it. I have been told that the only way a Blue Ribbon judge can tell the difference is the sharpness of the Ford script. But you will have to show me. I placed the reproduction next to the original and could not tell. I was advised by a good friend and master judge not to waste my time on the tailgate that 90 percent of the judges would not be able to tell. Looking back this was very good advice and unless your tailgate is in great shape I would recommend you doing the same. The remaining items I bought were the bed flooring, center bed panel, the metal bed strips, bed bolts, and all the bed rivets. I purchased all my parts from Walt Bratton; he only sells the best or not at all.



**Bed partially disassembled**

From here on I would like to go step by step in snippets and not bore you with a lot of reading. Many of the steps may be discarded if you desire to use body filler (Bondo). I did not want to use any filler unless it was absolutely necessary. There is less than a half of a teaspoon of body filler in my whole bed. This is one reason it took me 3 months working weekends to get my bed ready for paint.

1. Get a camera. A digital is best because you can quickly see the results, and the photo cost almost nothing. If you elect to disassemble the bed then you will need the photos later, trust me.
2. Strip the bed by media/sand blasting or wire wheel. I did both. I first did a half way job with my sand blaster and then I went after the sections with several types of abrasive/wire wheels and grinders. My buddy had a large grinder with a 9 inch wire wheel and it did a great job quickly but your arms and back felt it at the end of the day. I also used a 4.5 inch angle grinder with two types of wire wheels for smaller areas and a pneumatic air grinder with all kinds of abrasive wheels such as 3M Roloc@, and smaller wire wheels.



**Bed After a 'Hit & Miss' Sand Blasting to Remove Old Paint**

3. In order to repair all the rust out areas and remove the dents I had to disassemble the bed sections. Before I drilled any rivet I photographed the rivet as to which side was the peen side and which side was the head side.




**Typical Photograph of Rivets before removing.**

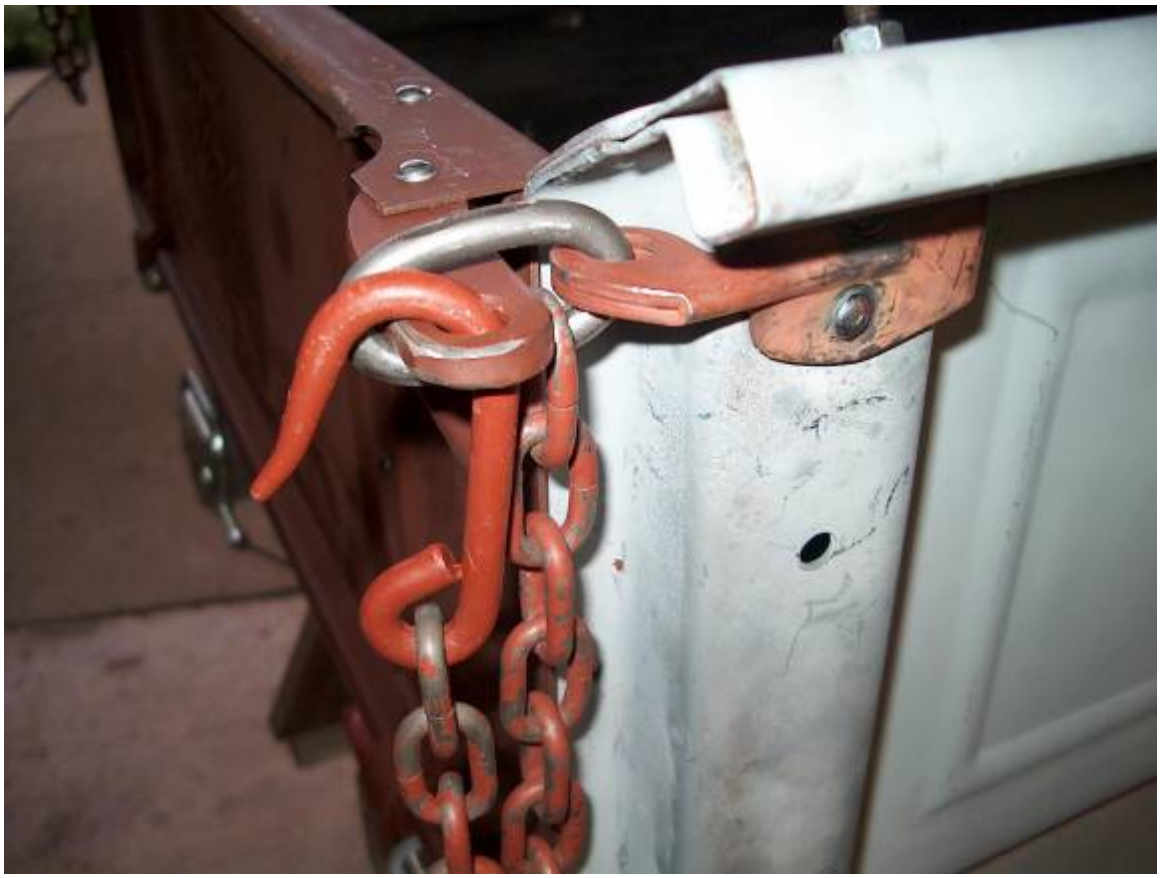
4. The front stanchion channels WERE NOT removed. The stanchion is the square hole that wood side racks fit into, one on each bed corner. There is one rivet that is different from all the rest on the bed and it is located at the bottom of the front stanchion channel and is the rivet closest to the fender spacer. You will quickly see that it has a much bigger bulge than any of the rest. I'm not sure why but it is the quickest way to identify an original bed from a reproduction or an original bed that is not correctly restored. If at all possible do not remove the front stanchion channels. The rear is not a problem because it is a one piece 'U' channel. The top cover for the 'U' channel on my bed had to be replaced because it was too far gone.



**Driver's Side Front Stanchion. Note Large Rivet End**

5. The top of the side panels (the roll over) is square the entire length. Trucks of the 40's and 50's had a round roll over on the top of the bed sides. Restoring the round roll over was much easier using a large steel ball. If your bed is anything like mine you will have several dents all along the top and sides of the roll over. I first folded up a good wad of course steel wool and pushed it down the inside of each hole to clean out the rust and crud on the inside. I had a large ¾ inch steel rod to push the steel wool back and forth. Once the inside was fairly clean I made a square 'dolly' that would fit snuggly on the inside of the square roll over. Using the steel bar I shoved the dolly down the hole until it met resistance. I was able to measure where the dolly was inside and thus it locates the dent on the outside. Then I heated just the dent to cherry red, not the entire circumference of the "roll over", and hammered the dolly with the steel rod past the dent, pushing the dent out. The area that was

not heated held the dolly true. This made dent removal in this area fairly easy. If you have a really big dent in the area, you may have to make several size dollies to work the dent
out



**Passenger Side Square Top Rail**

6. I then welded repair patches using the same gauge sheet metal to all the rust through areas. I smoothed the welds level with “Flap Disk” grinding wheels. Now it was time to go after the dents in the flat areas. Sand blasting leaves a dull finish to the metal and dents are difficult to identify. The wire wheels brought the metal to a bright stage and hundreds of small dents came to light. I used a magic marker around each dent so I wouldn’t miss any. The following photos show this. I inspected each area by holding a light very close and looking down the length of the section. I then hammered and dollied each dent smooth. The good news is that the metal is so thick once the dent is flat you can sand the area to make it level. This is how I was able to make the areas like new without the use of body filler.



**The Wire Wheel Brushes Buff the Sheet Metal to a Bright Finish.**



**I Primed and Painted This Bottom Section before I Riveted It to The Sub Frame**

7. My day job only allowed me to work on the Model A over the weekend. This meant that pieces needed to be protected from rust during the week. Even though I used epoxy primer on everything, I did spray the items that I worked on with sand-able auto body primer during the stops and starts of the body work. This kept the parts rust free. Prior to riveting the side panels to the bed sub-frame I painted the bottom section of the side panels and sub-frame where they meet with Rustoleum. This section is covered and will not be painted once riveted together. If you don't do this, over time water will get between the two sections and rust streaks will appear on your new paint job.



**Test Fit Bed Held together with Clamps. Note different Color Primer.**

8. At this stage it is time for dry fitting all the parts to the bed. This includes the fenders and braces. You want to make sure that all the holes line up and everything fits together with no gaps. It is too late after an expensive paint job.



**Dry Fitting the Tailgate and Fenders After Body Work**

9. When it came to dry fitting I bought a box of 1/4x20 x 1 inch bolts, nuts and flat washers. Remember the 50 plus rivets that you drilled out to disassemble the bed sections? I used the 1/4x20 bolts in EVERY hole where a rivet was removed. I installed them finger tight and then squared the bed from corner to corner. I held the bed square by using clamps and long boards. Then I tighten all the bolts, and double checked for trueness. Now I was sure that the bed was square and I could replace the bolts with a rivet one at a time. I begin by removing a bolt on one corner and replacing it with a rivet. I then moved to the other end of the bed and opposite corner and replaced that bolt with a rivet. This cross pattern is much the same as tightening a cylinder head but from the outside in. This may have been a little over board anal retentive, but my bed is flat, true and straight, and when it came time to place it on the frame all the bolt holes lined up perfectly.



**Note the Bolts in the Bottom and Sides Holding Everything Together**

10. The next step is to dry fit the wood bed sections. I first laid the boards side by side and selected the best looking surface of each board. As you dry fit each board with the best side up you may find some boards may need a little trimming to fit. I would recommend about 1/16$^{th}$ of an inch clearance on each end. Using a fine tip permanent marker I labeled the ends of each board that is close to the cab as to where that board would be installed. I also trimmed the wood around the center section so the square metal piece in the center would fit flush with the top of the wood.



**Wood Planks Dry Fitted to Riveted Bed**

11. The tailgate end of the reproduction metal strips that hold the wood boards to the bed, are not correct. The reproduction strips are flared and the originals have a nice round over on the ends. I used a bench grinder to round the end of a 5/16$^{th}$ inch rod and then I clamped it under the groove in the strip as close as I could to the end. This acted as a forming tool. I then heated the end cherry red and using a ball peen hammer, formed the end to match the original. You will also have to trim the wood under the edges on the very end that fits under each metal strip. This allows the strips to lay flat where they butt to the rear 'U' channel.



**Original Looking Reproduction Bed Strip Ends after Modifying**

12. The metal strips also require a small rivet located midway the length of the strip. I have seen several Pickup beds where the rivets are not installed or only in the two outside strips. The two outer strips really have no function, but the rivets in the two center strips help hold them in place to the center metal cover plate. I have not a clue how Henry Ford accomplished installing the two rivets on the center strips. What I did is to use a small Dremel cut-off wheel and make a vertical slit the length of the rivet shaft. I included theses rivets with the carriage bolts to be painted body color (see step 15).

13. With all the body repairs made, fenders and tailgate dry fitted, all the rivets installed, wood planks fitted, and metal bed strips modified, it was time for the epoxy primer.



**All the Metal Parts Were Painted With Epoxy Primer**

14. After the metal part of the bed was painted body color I was ready to install the wood. Ford originally made the bed completely assembled and everything was painted body color, wood and all. I wanted a different appearance so I opted to keep the natural look of the beautiful oak boards. After staining the wood I applied 3 coats of Spar Urethane with light sanding between each coat. This was done over a period of 3 or 4 days making sure each coat had dried. I applied the Spar Urethane to the sides, edges and the ends. Otherwise you risk the wood warping when wet. I drove two small nails into each end of the boards. I used the two sides of an old metal bed frame for the nails to rest on which allowed me to coat the boards without risk of marring the finish on the bottom side.

15. When the bed was painted I also had the metal bed strips, the rivets from step 12, and all the carriage bolts painted. I have seen many trucks with the natural wood boards and the metal strips painted the body color, but they used a cadmium finished carriage bolts. This always looked odd, having three different finishes in one area. Getting the bolts painted was not a big deal. I glued several thickness of a corrugated cardboard box together and used an awl to poke holes in the cardboard. I then pushed a carriage bolt into each hole making sure it was a tight fit. Very easy to paint all the bolts at one time.

16. Installing the wood boards in the bed can be a challenge, especially the two small center boards and metal center section. I was able to accomplish this

by myself plus install the metal strips and bolts. The trick is to put an old blanket or moving pad on the ground and stand the bed upright resting on the tailgate end, with the tailgate removed. I also placed a couple of 2X4's under the moving pad so the tailgate hinges would not be chipped or bent. This way I was able to take advantage of gravity to hold the small center boards and metal center cover in place while I installed the metal bed strips. Install the left and right outer boards then the left and right notched boards. Loosely install the metal bed strips to hold the boards in place. The center boards and metal cover are the last items to be installed. Start from the bottom and you should not have any problem. All the nuts on the bed carriage bolts should be finger tight so you and make minor adjustments if need be. Once everything is in place you can then tighten the nuts. The next step is to drill the holes in the wood along the outside edges and install those carriage bolts. The last thing is to install the two rivets from Step 12, the two that were modified by cutting a slit the length of the shank. I placed a dab of Super Glue under the head of the rivet and inserted it through the strip and the center plate. If you have a helper to hold the rivet in place you can skip the glue. With the rivet held in place I could then go to the bottom side of the bed and twist the legs of the rivet apart thus holding the two pieces together without damaging the paint.



**The Side Racks Match the Wood Bed. Note: Painted Carriage Bolts**

17. If you look closely in some pictures you will notice that I completed the entire restoration in a one car garage. I did not have a lot of fancy or special tools. I

just took my time and figured out tricks that would allow me to do it all by myself. Best of luck and don't hesitate to contact me if you have more questions.



**The Passenger is My Wife**

Doug Cox