

## JOE THOMA

**April 6, 1929 - October 7, 2015**

Even if you've been a member for quite a while, you may not have known Joe, as he left the area over two decades ago. Those of us who are long-time members hold him fondly among our memories.

Joe's Model A involvement began when he obtained a '30 Town Sedan for a sum of \$ and an old rifle. Were for this to not have happened, what is now known as the "GWC" might be long gone. You had to have known Joe to understand how he ticked. Joe, a graduate in accounting, had mechanical skills and loved to fix things. He was a friend to all, a big powerful man, an organizer, and a visionary. Put these attributes together and you can begin to understand how he transformed the Model A hobby in our area. He became a "Model A Goodwill Ambassador" for our club, missing no opportunity to add new members to the roster on a monthly basis. The roots of our chapter, in one form or another, go back to the late '50's, but when Joe joined it was more of a "coffee (or beer) klatch" than a club, with a membership limit of 17. At the first meeting he attended, 5 members were present, which incidentally included stalwart member Andy Jaeger.

Joe became President in 1974, a result of nominating committeeman Bill Worsham's persuasion. His acceptance was based on 2 conditions: that the limit of 17 members be removed, and that Bill serve as his Vice President.

Astronomical changes were afoot. Joe continued enthusiastically recruiting new members. His proposal to hold a car show evoked laughter initially, but he persisted and it came to pass, with Jerry's Ford of Annandale co-sponsoring it in 1974 at their location. It succeeded, and by then the club's roster had jumped to 75 members. We were on our way! Interestingly, a call went out at about the same time for members to form a caravan to attend the 1974 Sully plantation Show. It was not our "Sully", but one co-sponsored with the Park Authority by the National Capitol Region, AACA.

Fast forward to 1975. Our second car show was held at Jerry's Ford again, this time with a flea market added, headed by yours truly. How did it fare? An estimated doubling of attendees to 4,000, 138 cars, and 38 flea market spaces sold! Our membership had risen to 101 members, and a funny thing occurred—AACA dropped out and did not hold a 1975 Sully show. We subsequently left Jerry's and, putting our hat in the ring, embarked on our own new show in '76, this time at Sully, with none other than Bill Worsham in charge. A Board decision was made to buy a Model A and raffle it in order to build funds for the unknown challenge: how we would fare financially with our new, hopefully bigger, show. Joe headed the raffle committee along with Gordon Sanford, and they incentivized members to sell, sell tickets. By March of the year, 10 members had sold over 100 tickets each, more than covering the entire cost of the car. The Sully Show has been ours every year since our first in '76, thus helping greatly in financing our very prosperous chapter's activities and bringing respect and recognition to our chapter. Had it not been for Joe, GWC likely would not be where we are today, if existent at all. Joe Thoma will be sorely missed by those who were his friends, and appreciated by all aware of his many contributions.

Dave Henderson

## FOND MEMORIES OF JOE THOMA

I bought my first model A in October of 1971. I didn't know much about Model A's. I had heard about a club but also heard they had a seventeen member limit. I didn't know anyone in the club so I didn't pursue it any further.

One day my then 5 year old son came running into the house saying, Dad, Dad, there's a Model A in the driveway. Sure enough there was a battered looking '30 Town Sedan and out stepped this big guy wearing a cowboy hat. He introduced himself said he was heading to a model A club meeting and I was welcome to come along and join the club.

Joe's idea was to do away with the seventeen member limit and open the club up to anyone who had an interest in a Model A. Shortly thereafter the GWC elected its first board of directors. Joe was elected President. Joe would spend his weekends searching out new members and invite them to a meeting. The club started growing in leaps and bounds. I think we ended the year with 75 members mostly due to Joe's fine effort.

One day several of us were returning from a car show and stopped by Joe's house to see how his restoration was coming. Joe had decided to restore his car but didn't want to take the body off the frame. Some of us had other ideas. While Joe was inside eating his lunch we removed the body and set it on a couple of saw horses. When Joe returned to the garage he couldn't believe his eyes. After that it became a frame up restoration. That car today belongs to Andy Jaeger.

Joe moved to Colorado in the mid 90's but occasionally would come back to visit around Hershey time. It's ironic that several of us were talking about Joe at Hershey just last week only to find out later that Joe had passed at age 86.

The club is what it is today thanks to the efforts of people like Joe Thoma.

Bill Worsham



Joe Thoma (by Andy Jaeger) visits old friends at Hershey in 2010

## MY FRIEND, JOE THOMA

In 1970, my workplace was transferred to a new location in Crystal City. It was there that Joe and I first met. I and he, a big powerful and friendly guy, found that we had mutual interests. Joe was soon to become owner of a Model A in non-running condition, which he had come upon and negotiated the purchase of. Being a born tinkerer with a love of fixing things, it was a perfect match. In time it became fully restored (with the "help" of several friends who removed the body, a fiasco you no doubt will be reading about elsewhere).

As Membership Chairman of what was to eventually become our George Washington Chapter, he began encouraging me to join the club. While I had various car interests, I didn't think I was ready then to branch into the Model A world. However, Joe persisted relentlessly and won me over. Since I lacked a Model A, Joe took care of that too, locating for me a '31 Victoria "barn find" (unfortunately without barn!). He helped me retrieve it, which required some considerable effort in preparing it to be towed and included the sorting and removal of miscellaneous items, mostly junk. Very fortunately, enough of it was piled on the roof, thus saving most of the body wood!

Among the treasures found in it was a curious, neglected double-ended Crescent adjustable wrench, a type neither of us had ever seen before. Joe took a liking to it and I insisted he take it. Working on it diligently, he soon had it shining and working perfectly. In the years that followed it was often his companion, pocketed along with a favorite jack knife.



We enjoyed taking an afternoon off now and then and hitting the road in his VW Microbus. Usually we aimed toward the boondocks, to scrounge for interesting stuff. He had an uncanny ability to sniff out hidden items of interest, once including a monstrous collection of Edsels! During one of these safaris Joe found a nice set of bumpers for his Model A and I picked up a good pair of headlights. Other trips yielded a steam whistle, a complete rear axle, and a collection of NOS Model A parts from obsolete Western Auto stock. Regardless of what we came back with, we always returned feeling better, it was our "fix".

My admiration of Joe never ceased, and when he moved away in the '90's we kept in touch. Our birthdays were in the same month, just a few days apart. There was always a call from one of us, wishing the other Happy Birthday.

Sadly, Joe suffered a stroke from which he never fully recovered. As an octogenarian he gradually slowed in other aspects as well. One day I received a surprise package containing some items I knew he had cherished and held closely. His objective was clear, to give away to me treasures he knew he soon would not be needing, as the clock was ticking down. Much to my surprise, included among the contents was that double-ended Crescent wrench! Knowing how much it meant to him it will always be coveted by me too, a cherished reminder of my old friend Joe.

Dave Henderson