

Model T Ford "Extendo" Kits

By Donald F. Wood, San Francisco, California



This T-frame extension involved a longer driveshaft and was made by the F. A. B. Manufacturing Co. of Emeryville, CA, later known as FABCO. (Photo courtesy FABCO)

Truck historians tend to underrate the Ford, possibly because it was small, or possibly because it was so common—Fords can be seen everywhere in the street scenes of old newsreels. For quite a while Fords made up half the number of new trucks sold; but numbers can be misleading, since many Ford trucks had been converted from automobiles.

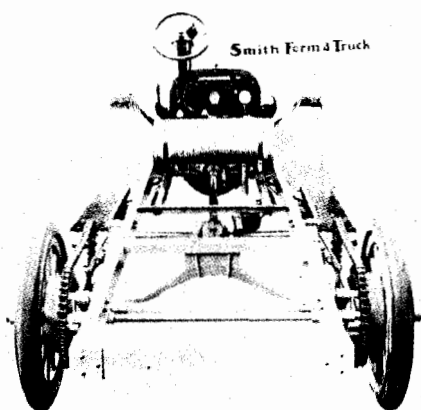
There was once a thriving business in providing kits for converting Model T Fords (and other autos) to trucks, with at least a dozen firms offering such kits. The T's frame was strengthened and lengthened while the rear hubs were fitted with sprockets and linked by chain drive to a new, heavier rear axle located farther back than it had been on the auto. The best known maker probably was the Smith Form-a-Truck Co. of Chicago. So successful were these truck kits that Ford introduced his own truck in 1917, the Ford Model TT.

Issues of the *Automobile Trade Journal* from 1915-1920 in the library of The William F. Harrah Automobile Foundation in Reno yielded a wealth of information about these extension kits. Some manufacturers' kits extended the frame and placed a chain drive sprocket on the auto's hubs. The Redden Motor Truck Co. of New York claimed their kit weighed 900 pounds, could be installed "by anyone" in a few hours, and yielded a rig with a 132" wheelbase. Another firm, the Union Truck Mfg. Co. of New York City, guaranteed that their conversion would have a 1-1/2-ton payload.

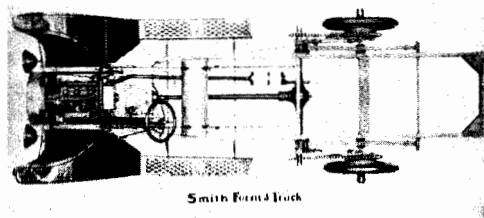
The Simplex Truckform Company of Chicago advertised that their kits clamped on and off, making conversion back to an auto easier, and the Rayford Company of Philadelphia sold a unit with a 124" wheelbase. The Detroit Truck Company of Detroit advertised its "Tonford" kit, indicating that the Ford Roadster cost \$390 and the kit cost \$325, so the buyer could have a new, 1-ton truck for \$715 (plus freight). The Commercial Truckmobile Co. of Chicago built a 1-ton Truckmobile attachment with a 133" wheelbase, and reference to a Maxfer Ton Truckmaker for Fords was found in one issue of *Automobile Trade Journal*.

An alternative to the chain drive was to add a longer driveshaft. A major manufacturer offering this feature was the Hudford Company of Philadelphia, which later changed its product's name to Truxton. Truxton ads claimed that their product could make units with up to two tons of capacity, and either 126" or 138" wheelbases. The buyer also had gear ratio options as he chose the gear axle.

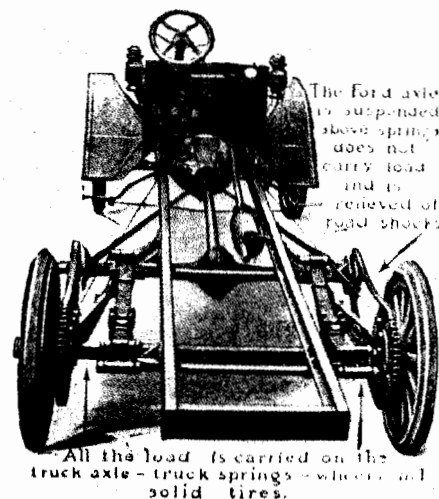
Other manufacturers of the straight drive included the F. A. Ames Company of Owensboro, Kentucky; the Jewett Car Company of Newark, Ohio; the Partlow-Jenkins Motor Car Company of Indianapolis (maker of the Partford); and the Motor-Accessory Distributing Co. of Boston, which sold "Longford" auto parts. The Longford kit included:



Left, below: two views of a Smith Form-a-Truck added to a Ford T. Original rear axle has chain drives, brake cables are visible. (Photo courtesy Lorin Sorensen)



Right: rear view of Redden kit. (Photo courtesy Harrah Foundation)



Same drive as used on trucks costing from 3 to 5 times as much

\$360
EQUIPMENT
OF
HUDFORD



U.S. Patent claims allowed. Patents pending in Foreign Countries

*This rig has a Hudford extender, using an elongated driveshaft.
(Photo courtesy Harrah Foundation)*

- 2 extension side frames
- 2 spring leaves
- 4 rear spring clips
- 1 rear axle truss rod
- 1 shaft extension support
- 1 Longford extension drive shaft set
- 2 running board brackets
- 1 running board brace rod
- 2 standards for side frame truss rods
- 2 side frame truss rods
- 2 brake rod extensions
- 2 side mud pans
- 2 running boards
- 1 taillight bracket
- 15 cotter pins
- 1 rear spring hanger
- 35 rivets
- 36 bolts

Still another firm was the Xtend-Ford Company of Philadelphia, located next door to the Hudford Company and probably related. Their kits included running board extensions, aprons which fit above the running board up to the bottom of the body, and rear commercial fenders.

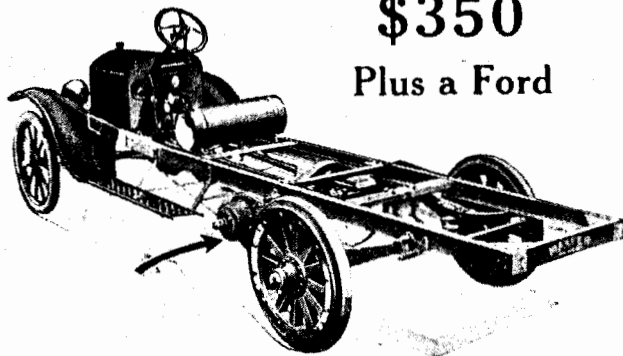
While most makers advertised that their kits were for Fords, a few indicated that their kits could be used on other makes. Guaranty Motors of Cambridge, Massachu-

Ford with an extended chassis used to carry bagged coal. Front tires are pneumatic, rear ones are solid—common for most kits in the 'teens. (Photo courtesy FABCO)



The price talks.

\$350
Plus a Ford



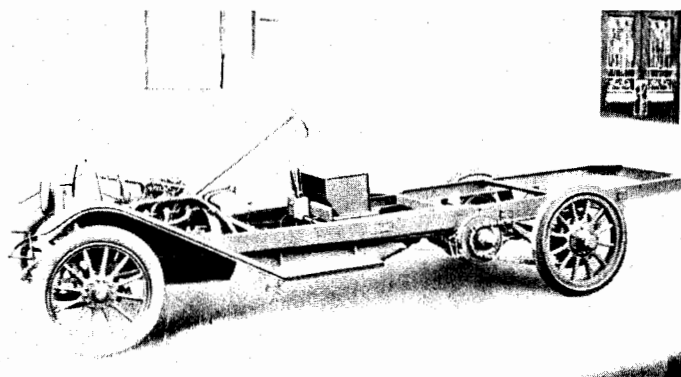
The Maxfer kit. (Photo courtesy Harrah Foundation)

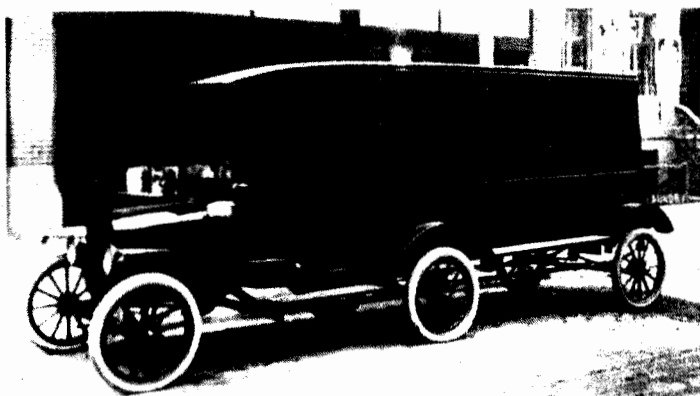
setts, built internal gear, shaft drive extensions units, and pictured them in use on Ford, Peerless, Apperson, Buick, Cadillac, Pierce-Arrow, and Overland autos. In Chicago the Dearborn Motortruck Company built the chain drive "Dearborn Truck Attachment" for Fords, but some of their ads show them attached to Cadillac, Maxwell, Buick, Mitchell, Chalmers, Cole, Hudson, Overland, and Packard auto chassis. Their ads indicated four kits: the \$350 kit which converted a Ford into a 1-ton truck; the \$400 kit which converted any other make into a 1-ton truck; the \$450 kit which converted a Ford into a 2-ton truck; and the \$500 kit which converted any other car into a 2-ton truck.

Three other types of kits should be noted. The previously mentioned Smith Form-a-Truck Co. of Chicago also built Smith Form-a-Tractor kits which, according to the ad, allowed the owner to convert his Model T to a tractor, or back again, in fifteen minutes. The tractor axle fit to the rear of the auto's axle and roller pinions were placed on the auto's hubs. They meshed with a bull ring gear inside the tractor wheels, and the gear reduction increased power by 11 times. The kit included frame reinforcers, a cellular radiator, and a force-feed oil system; both of the latter were needed because of the increased strain on the engine. Another firm that made tractor kits

(cont'd next page)

Extended auto chassis (with white-out around truck so it could be used in a catalog). Unit was built by Reliance, a body builder still active in northern California. Poster in background advertises a Fatty Arbuckle movie. (Photo courtesy Reliance)

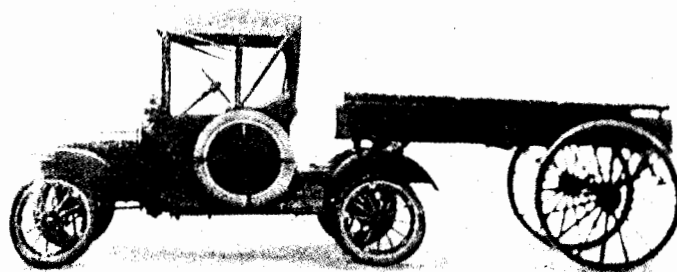




A rare Model T Extension involved adding a trailing axle which effectively doubled the length of the vehicle. The middle axle was powered and, apparently, the very rear wheels turned. (Photo courtesy Frank Malatesta)

for Fords was the LaFayette Engineering Co. of Lafayette, Indiana, who also provided a special radiator and a force-feed oil system.

The Martin Rocking Fifth Wheel Co. of Springfield, Massachusetts, had kits that involved removing the trunk from a Ford Model T roadster and adding a fifth wheel for pulling semi-trailers. And the McCord Manufacturing Co. of Detroit made a truck box that would replace the rear half of a Ford touring body. The auto's touring body could apparently be disconnected at the front of the



The Martin fifth wheel, for pulling a semi-trailer. (Photo courtesy Harrah Foundation)

rear doors, and photos show the back of the front seat as exposed. The McCord ad exclaimed, "You change from truck to touring car—or touring car to truck in 1 MINUTE." The truck could carry a half-ton.

As mentioned earlier, these kits were so successful that Ford himself began producing trucks in 1917. The demand for the product dropped, but did not go away completely. Long frames were needed in the logging industry and for school bus chassis, and, as states enacted axle loading laws, kits became available for adding an axle (often unpowered) to the rear of the driving one.

(Author's note: Many of the photos used in this article Automobile Trade Journal, 1915-19, in the library of The William F. Harrah Automobile Foundation in Reno, NV.—dfw.)

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