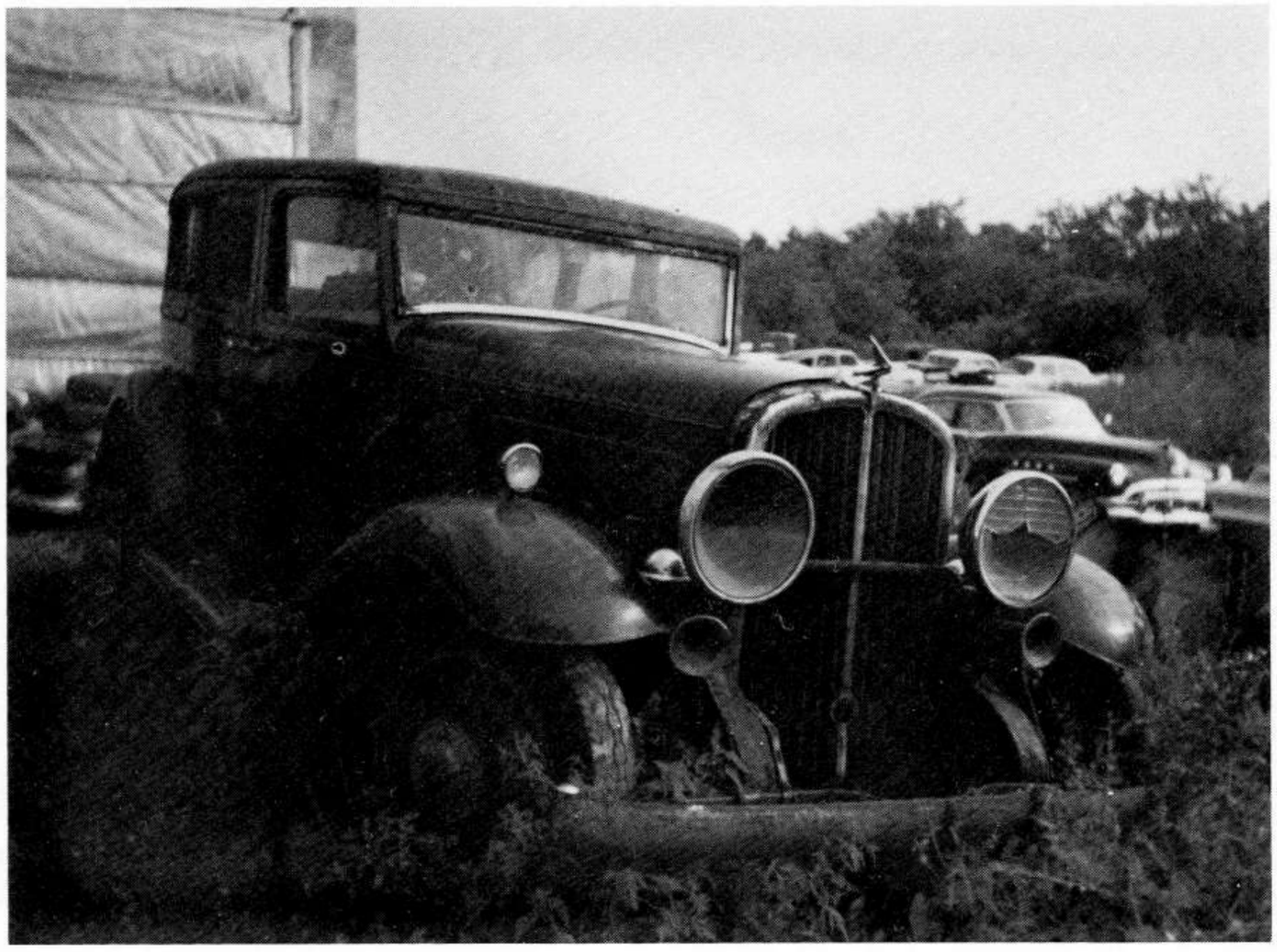


Car, resting in junkyard from which I obtained it in 1968.

A

1932 Series

16 A Touring

Created by FRANK GARDNER

Metamorphosis

Photo by Robert D. Wild

A 1932 SERIES 16-A FRANKLIN CREATED

by Frank H. Gardner

Regular readers of *Air Cooled News* will realize by now that I enjoy restoring Franklin Airman cars (see *A.C.N.* #69, p. 3 and *A.C.N.* #79, p. 5).

To obtain the parts for an authentic restoration of my 1932 sedan, I had to buy another Franklin from a junkyard, which yielded such important items as wire wheels, welled front fenders, the correct spare tire covers, and a luggage rack. After I had removed all the parts I needed for the sedan's restoration, I had to decide what to do with the leftover parts car. Although the car had stood out in the weather for more years than I would venture to guess, it was still restorable despite considerable rust and complete wood rot.

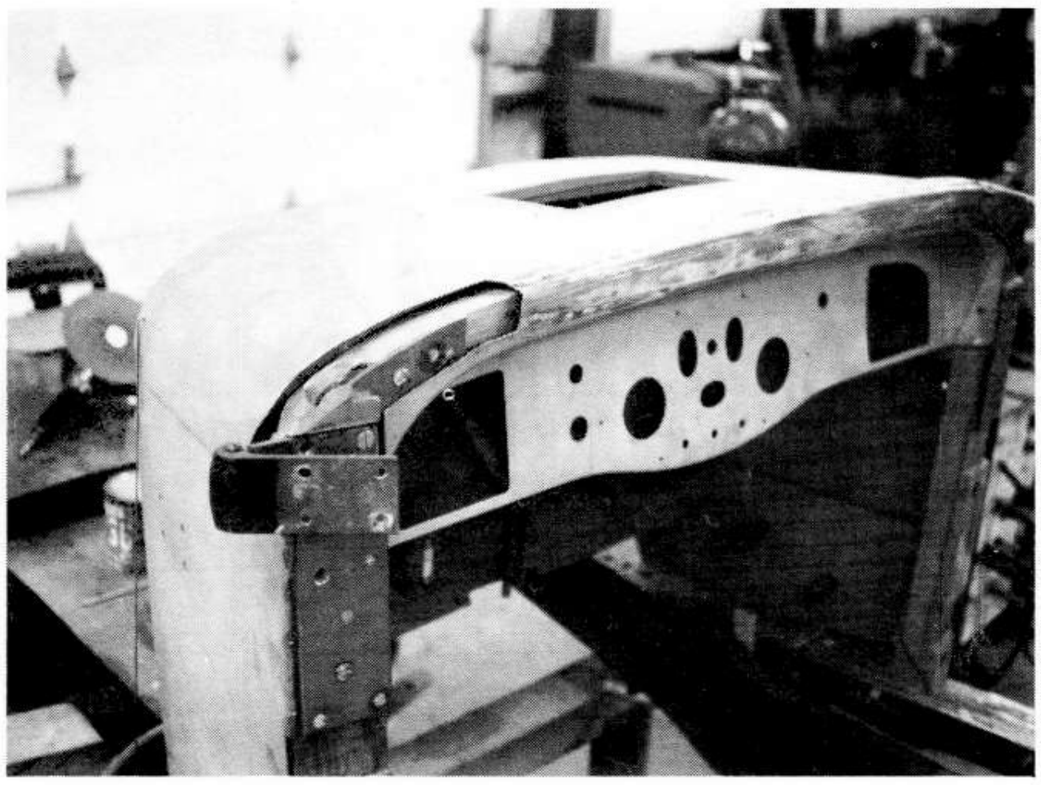
Parts cars, as most of us know, often occupy more space than a complete vehicle, and oh, aren't they unsightly! There were several possibilities. One was to sell it to a collector who just might need some of its remaining parts to complete his own restoration. That would certainly solve the storage problem. I considered dismembering the corpse and storing its useful components against future emergencies. Yet there was so much good sound stuff in the car, I was reluctant to reduce, even by one, the number of surviving 1932 Series 16-A Franklin Airman cars.

Then my attention was drawn to a Packard parts car I had owned for nearly 20 years. The remains of a 1929 Model 633 Touring, it has often provided parts necessary to keep its twin sister in good running conditon. At that point my imaginaton started to race. I have always wanted a late model Franklin open car. As I looked at the 1932 parts sedan with the wooden framing of its body rotted away and then studied the Packard parts car, I suddenly visualized a beautiful marriage!

I realized that the Franklin chassis, which was complete, could be restored to good running condition. Second, I felt that the proper man could transform the body into a very presentable copy of a Franklin Phaeton. This was a particularly reasonable possibility because the windshield corner posts and the top frame, essential for an open car, were already at hand on the Packard. Some quick measurements also confirmed that the Packard's luggage rack could be fitted to the Phaeton without being offensive.

I lost no time in contacting Jon Abrahamson of Enfield (Connecticut) Auto Restoration, which had done the body work on the 1932 sedan. When we discussed the idea on the telephone, Jon said he would pursue the project only if, after examining all the bits and pieces, he decided that an attractive, Phaeton body could be built from them. I admired him for that attitude and told him we saw eye-to-eye.

We stuffed all the parts into my trailer and carted them from my Vermont barn to Jon's shop. He promptly removed the upper half of the body and installed many



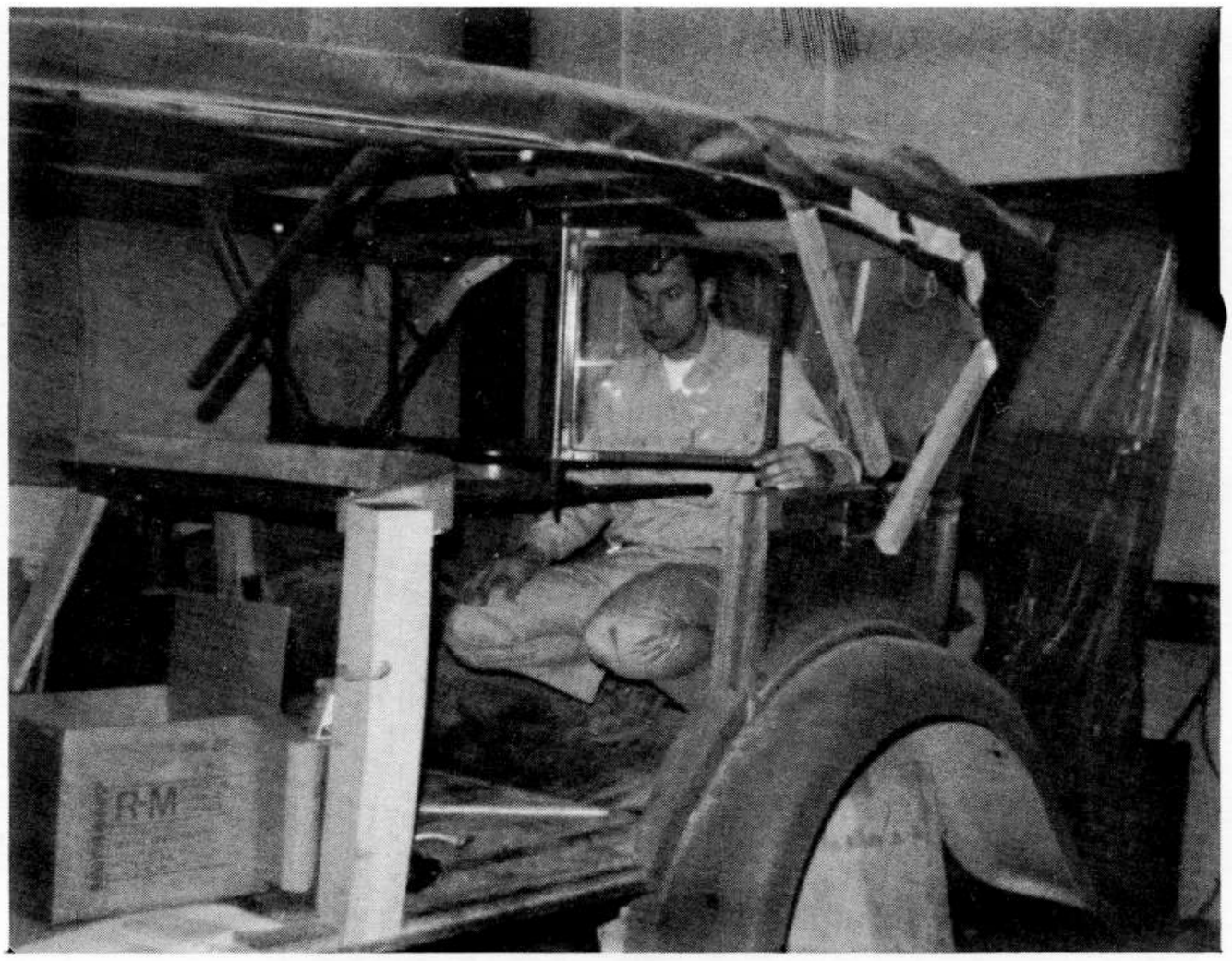
Some major surgery was required to alter cowl area from sedan style to phaeton type.

of the component parts in a temporary fashion. The results of the test convinced us both that we could proceed.

Once we decided, the die was cast. I then took the engine to Dutch Kern in Coopersburg, Pennsylvania for a complete rebuild, feeling that at least that much should be done while the body and chassis were detained elsewhere. Dutch performed his customary magic and now I have an engine that operates like a new one in every respect!

Meanwhile, back in Enfield, Jon Abrahamson dealt with all the problems and intracasies of transforming the 1932 Franklin sedan into an open car. I have always believed that the 1932 Series 16 Franklins were the best looking of the later cars, and at this point I was very curious to see what a 1932 Phaeton would look like. I didn't find out overnight! The project proved to be long and drawn out, but considering what had to be done and the weatherworn condition of the basic structure, this came as no surprise.

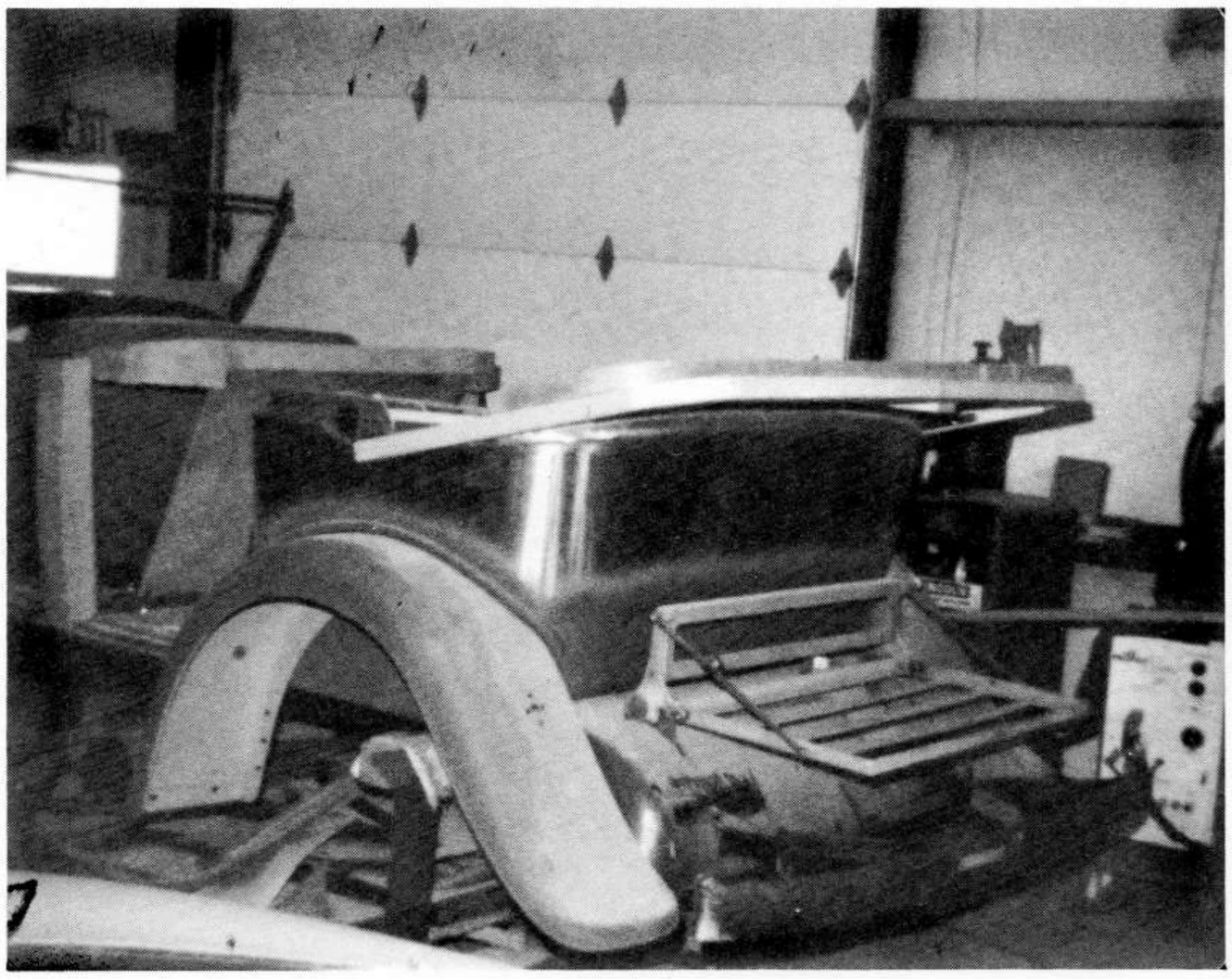
All new wooden body framing was required.



A strongly built divider extends from one side to the other behind the front seat. Tonneau windshield is being fitted by Jon Abrahamson.

Fortunately, Jon has a capable woodworker, because all the wooden body framing had to be replaced, while the top bows had to be shaped and carefully steam-bent. Jon also had to build a strong, yet inconspicuous, cross piece to hold the body together amidships. In a sedan this job is done by vertical posts, which run from the floor between the doors to the top framing. In an open body a strongly braced divider is required and actually forms a partition between front and rear passenger compartments. Here Jon deftly mounted the fittings for a tonneau windshield we had located of the correct period and into the back side he built storage space for the side curtains and the top boot. This space is fitted with a door hinged at the bottom, which when closed makes it totally inconspicuous.

The doors presented some problems, particularly their lower portions, where the rust was so extensive that replacement sections had to be welded in. With determination and skill Jon and his men formed the door tops to make them appear as narrow as possible but still conform to the solid portion of the body. The doors of a sedan are thicker than on an open car in order to accomodate roll up glass windows. It demanded considerable skill to convert them properly into doors for a Phaeton and still leave enough space for door pockets and the latch mechanism. The doors also had to be cut down to compensate for the supporting divider that had been built between them. The rear doors, furthermore, were altered to hinge from the front. All this was done and professionally so.



Luggage rack from Packard parts-car fits snugly up to rear of body.

The author inspects newly installed rear body framing.

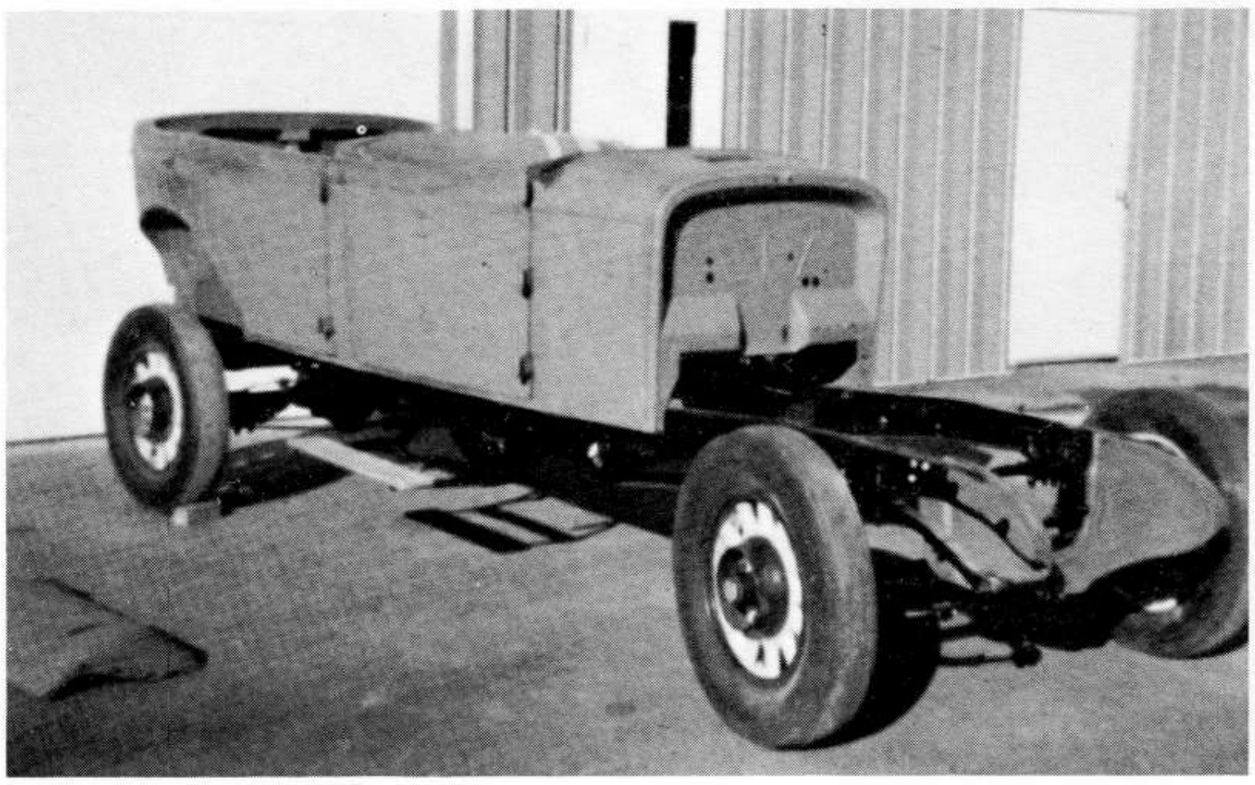
Although the windshield stanchions and top frame from the Packard remained in basically sound condition, they required some repair and modification for the Franklin. Since the Packard's body is considerably narrower, the stanchions were carefully altered for a perfect marriage with the Franklin's cowl.

Because of rot and age, the top frame required a set of new bows and several other changes to make it suitable. Since the fittings that secure the front bow to the windshield stanchions are no longer an off-the-shelf item, they had to be specially made.

The top bow rests, which support the top when it is folded, also had to be made specially. In my effort to keep the car looking as much like a Franklin as possible, I was determined that these rests look authentic. Since the last open Franklin car was a 1931, the closest I could come was to copy the top rests on that car. Fortunately, Ronald Andrew, who lives nearby and is always anxious to be helpful, owns a 1931 Pursuit. One cold November day in 1980, my friend, Robert D. Wild, and I visited the Andrew Franklin and took accurate measurements. With these in hand Bob, who is a skilled artisan, made a pattern from which a fine pair of top rests were cast.

Exhausted in my search for an original Franklin luggage rack, I finally presented Jon Abrahamson with the rusty but perfectly restorably one from the Packard and asked whether he could adapt it. "I don't see why not!" he replied, as optimistic as always. To do so, he relocated the filler neck of the gasoline tank closer to the back of the body. This enables the luggage rack to be snugged up to the body and allows the bumper with a pair of extra long supports to protrude inches beyond the rack, giving it good protection. To give the rack every appearance of an original Franklin item, I used the same aluminum channel with rubber inserts that is used on the running boards.

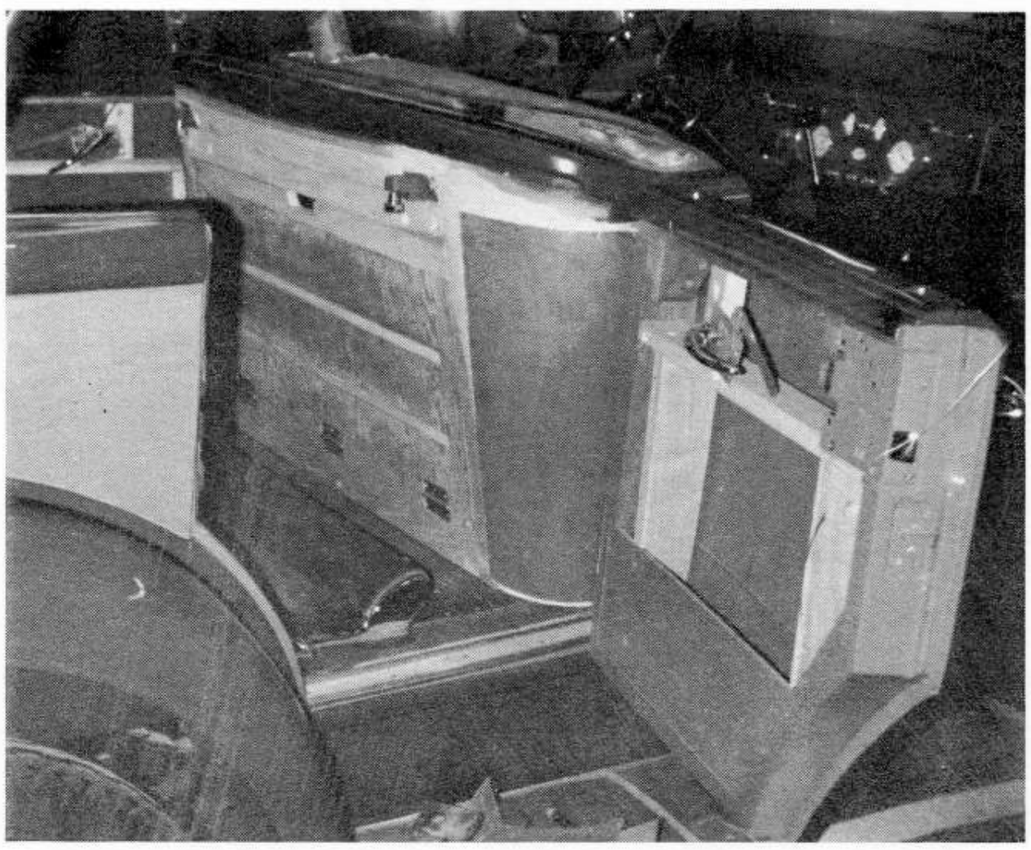
For running boards, I had exact duplicates made by Enfield Auto Restoration utilizing the original heavy bracing and covered them in my own workshop. New stainless steel moldings were fabricated by a Boston sheet metal shop.



With body ready for final painting, rebuilt engine was then lowered into place. Next, the car went to Dutch Kern's shop where every mechanical detail was completed to perfection.

The Franklin had welled front fenders for spare tires when I obtained it from the junkyard, but those had been installed on the 1932 sedan. Since the new Phaeton called for welled fenders too, Jon skillfully executed a magnificent transformation on a practically new pair of non-welled fenders I provided. Now we had to locate a pair of 1932 metal spare tire covers, a task that makes looking for a needle in a haystack seem easy. I had almost given up and resigned myself to making covers from top material, when a pair (both lefts) surfaced in nearby Sherborn, Massachusetts at the home of H.H.F.C. member Galen Green. He is making progress restoring his father's 1931 convertible coupe Model 153, in which he vividly remembers riding as a boy, Galen needed a hood-front shell, which I had, and we arranged a swap. At some time in the past, his tire covers must have been rolled as hoops by children, so battered and flattened were the circumfrential stainless steel trim pieces. Judging them to be beyond repair, I obtained replacements, which are only slightly narrower. Attaching them was tricky, but the problem was eventually solved by a friend of mine, Ole Vikre, who is a retired, skilled machinist. Thanks to him, they now look as if they belonged.

During the five-year restoration various friends who knew the carcass I had started with would often inquire whether I was having success in locating important essential parts. More often than not I was able to answer, "Yes, thank you, a good hood-front shell just arrived from the state of Washington," or, "Parking lights and hood latches have come from California." I find it interesting to think of all the various items which now form an integral part of one complete unit, and the numerous places, country-wide, whence they came. The little hand levers surrounding the horn button on the steering column that control the lights and throttle came



View at right rear door before going to upholstery shop

Already for its new top and trunk cover.

from John Tripier in Pennsylvania via Frank Wemple in Connecticut, at whose house I collected them. The head lamps spent years in a junkyard in Meridith, N.H., but fortunately, were protected from the weather. The twin trumpet horns as well as the spare tire supports and locking arms came from the West Coast. During a motor trip in the winter of 1976, I called to see Eino Heikkila, in Phoenix, Arizona and the 1932 sedan he was restoring. He very kindly gave me an excellent ammeter gauge. From his astonishing parts department, Dutch Kern provided a left side hood-self, while the cowl trim bands were supplied by Jack Lanford in Virginia. Dwight Carter of Des Moines, Iowa, located four nice inside door handles and a good tail light. Jim Pearce of West Sussex, England, who did much of the work on my roadster, contributed a fine pair of ex-Bentley arm rests for the front doors. I have mentioned only a few of the many items needed to show how far reaching a parts search can be.

Numerous other items could not be located and were specially made from scratch. These included portions of the Packard's top frame to adapt it to the Franklin as well as knobs for the choke, spark control, and glove compartment doors. Two large nuts, which hold the headlamps in place, conduit tubes for the wires, and eight trim strips to adorn the splash shields were made from brass. Escutchions for the door handles were cast and prepared for plating. While the originals seldom lasted, their replacements should outlast some other parts of the car. New Oakes locks for the spare tires were not available when I needed them, so Ole Vikre devised a substitute, which in appearance is identical. The only difference is that my key is an Allen wrench. This unique lock device is described in full detail in *A.C.N.* #69, p. 8, col. 2. Other custom made items are eight side curtain rods, mounting brackets for the horns, and four leather straps to secure the spare tires to their supports.

Photo by Robert D. Wild

Side curtain storage compartment is located behind front seat.

Photo by Robert D. Wild

Front seat area. Hand levers for brake and throttle do not interfere with normal foot operation.

New and rebuilt items from a variety of sources were also incorporated into the car. The rebuilt overdrive came from Bob Green's shop in Ohio, while the sockets for the side curtain rods were purchased new and are duplicates of those used on Packards, Cadillacs, Rolls Royces, and other fine cars. The windshield wiper and its slave is sold as correct replacement equipment for Ford cars of the 30's. I obtained the aluminum channels for the running boards and luggage rack in England.

In choosing the proper color scheme, my wife and I concentrated very hard to select compatible shades. Early in the project we decided to use two shades of brown, but not until Jon Abrahamson supplied me with all his color chips did we realize how many shades of brown there are. We had to whittle them all down to two. Since I had been guided throughout the project by a desire to retain a genuine Franklin look, I sought to duplicate the two shades of brown that the company used as a standard color scheme on many of its cars in 1932. Years ago we owned a mint 1932 close-coupled sedan painted exactly this way, so we knew what we were seeking. Finally, we came upon two chips (Mercedes and Volvo) which seem just right. After Jon sprayed two 8½"x11" panels so we could examine them in sunlight, shadow, and shade, it became obvious that our search had been successfully completed.

The next job was to choose and locate suitable upholstery, top, and carpet materials. We painstakingly examined all the available leather samples. Since they came in a variety of colors, we easily eliminated most of them and soon reduced the choice to several shades of brown. After we studied these in daylight and shadow, placing them against the brown sample panels, we chose those that complemented the paint scheme best. After that we had no problem in selecting the proper shades of fabric for the carpet and top. We had learned that a new, sligthly darker shade of top material had recently became available. Not only does it blend nicely with the paint, but it also has the advantage of retaining its color longer than the usual material, which tends to bleach almost white when exposed to the sun after several summers.

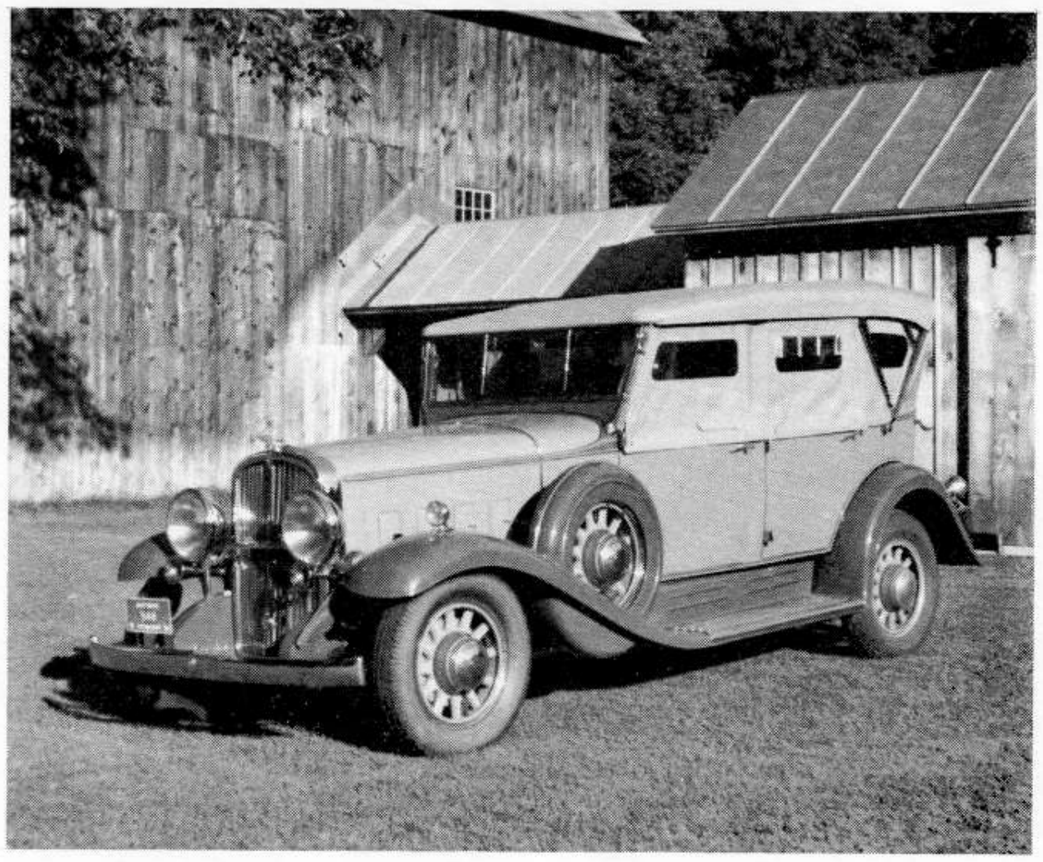
Because of his superbly careful and painstaking workmanship, Leif Drexler of Sicklerville, New Jersey, who so skillfully upholstered my 1932 sedan, was selected to do all of the trim work on the Phaeton. Leif is a master at his craft and it is obvious why so many of the cars he has upholstered have been National First Prize winners.

By the time Leif had completed his flawless work, the 1981 Franklin Trek was pressing down upon us, and I was most anxious to take the Phaeton to Cazenovia if at all possible. Yet a number of items remained to be done. It was a scorching day in July when my friend, Jim Hancock, and I collected the car in New Jersey and trailered it back to Enfield, Connecticut, to have stripes painted on the body and wheels. After a week the car was back in the trailer and on its way to the New Hampshire workshop of Jonathan Bateman, a clever machinist and restorer who designed and installed hand controls Readers of *A.C.N.* may recall that due to a 1951 attack of polio all my cars are fitted for hand operation of brake and throttle. With this installation complete, the Phaeton remained in the trailer until it was unloaded at the Trek a few days later (see photos *A.C.N.* #83, p. 14).

How does a car that has undergone such a complete metamorphosis as this one behave? How does it handle on the road? With all the added speed from the overdrive how does the wind affect the passengers? Let me tell you!

I can only describe the Franklin's performance as absolutely splendid, for which I am exceedingly grateful to Dutch Kern. His painstaking thoroughness is evident not only in the rebulit engine, which runs like new, but in everything else about the car, which performs smoothly and flawlessly. To drive the car is to experience what the owner of a brand new Series 16A Franklin must have experienced 50 years ago. It is whisper-quiet, yet tremendously powerful and fast. On the open road in overdrive it keeps pace with modern traffic effortlessly, never overheats, and the large diameter hydraulic brakes make this perfectly safe.

I find it interesting to compare the Franklin with a modern car. Does it have power brakes? Of course not! It is a very heavy car, but does it stop easily? Certainly! I can push the hand lever with my thumb bringing this large car with a weight that exceeds two tons to a smooth and easy stop. How about steering? That's easy too! All equipment is original save the addition of a dampener on the tie-rod to discourage any tendency to shimmy. "It steers," as my father used to exclaim when driving our 1929 Model 135, "like a baby carriage!"



Drying top and side curtains after return from 1981 Trek.

How about gear shifting? My left leg has about 25% of normal strength, yet I can operate the clutch without any auxiliary aids. At request the Franklin can creep at a snail's pace in high gear due to its excellent torque. However I never permit it to struggle and labor when a shift of gears is indicated for, as all Franklin owners know, the fan must be kept spinning to avoid overheating the engine. Everyone who has driven the car, at the Trek and elsewhere, agrees with me that it is an easy and fun car to drive.

The wings on the front windshield plus the tonneau windshield keep even the most wind-shy passengers in a cheerful mood. Attached to the lower edge of the tonneau windshield is a wind apron made of top material. This useful item reaches the floor just in front of the passenger's toes and prevents the wind from blowing up his trousers and out the collar. This curtain, combined with the front and rear wings, provides almost wind-free motoring for all the car's occupants. A full day of driving is not the least uncomfortable.

We shall enjoy many trips over the next 25 years or so in our wonderful Franklin, not only here in beautiful New England where we live, but also to points north, south, and west. Cazenovia, New York, is on the schedule for this summer. H.H.F.C. members who may have missed seeing this possibly first and only 1932 Series 16-A Franklin Phaeton last year will have another opportunity in 1982.

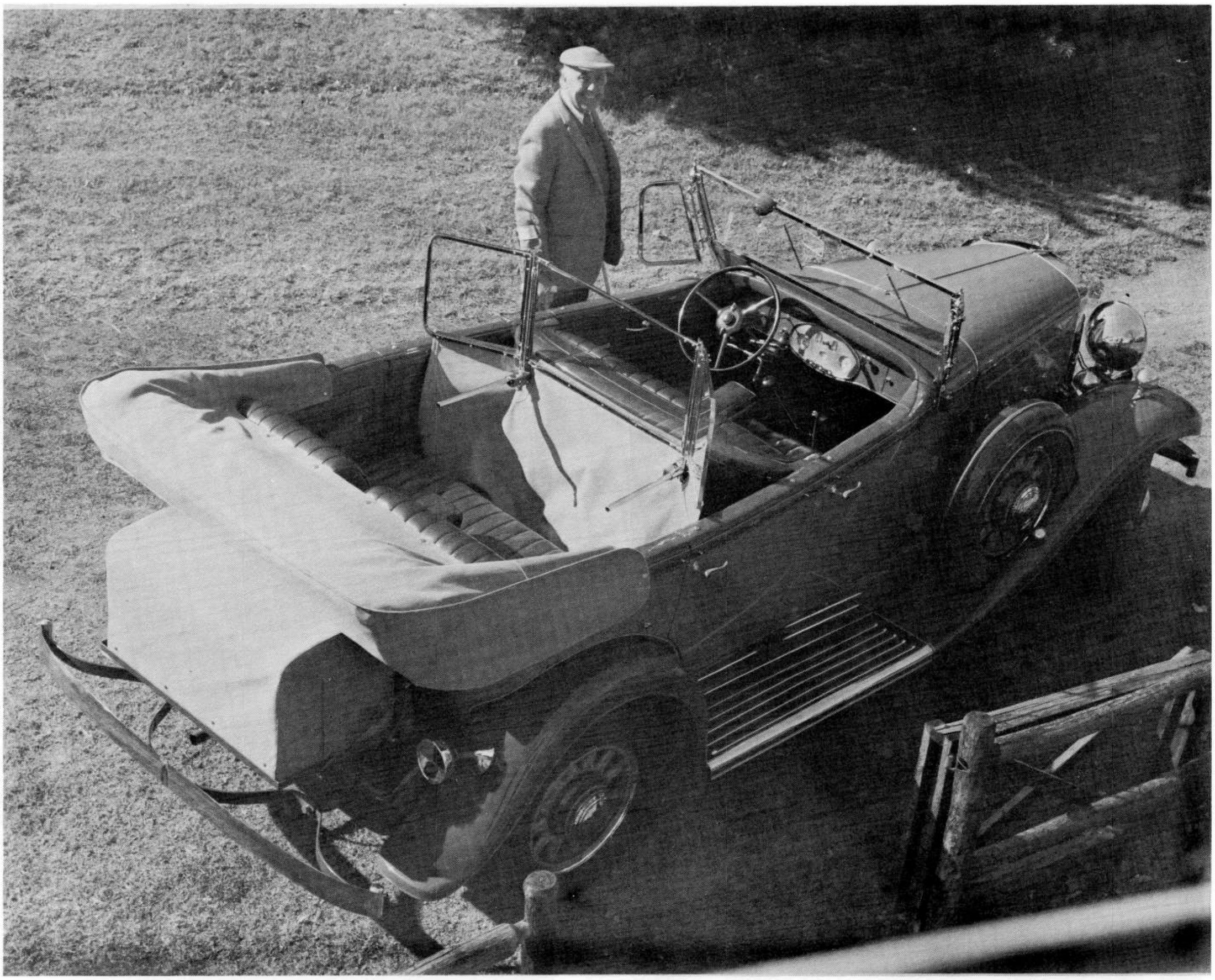


Photo by Robert D. Wild

Tonneau windshield will move toward rear seat on the two chrome rods. Note wind curtain which hangs to floor.