

A VENT WINDOW VIEW – *Four & Forty A/C*

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Most everyone in CHVA over the age of 40 can remember at least one trip in an automobile that had no air conditioning system beyond the well-known “four and forty.” For those who do not recall that method, “four and forty” means traveling 40 mph with all four windows rolled down.

This practice had its perils. In the Midwest, air rushing in through open car windows sometimes carried insects into the passenger compartment. June bugs and grasshoppers were among the most frequent. (In my youth stories abounded about other creatures such as birds joining a family outing via an open vent window but, fortunately, that was an experience I never suffered.)

Bugs were bad enough. They were considerably disoriented by those high-speed and unexpected excursions. Usually they ended up in even worse shape after being ejected by folks seated in the car. I remember that my sisters tended to express their displeasure in a rather unladylike manner when a bug arrived “unexpectedly.”

Of course, when a June bug traveling 40 mph encountered one of those beehive hairdos some ladies fancied in the Sixties, the owner usually reacted with considerable distress, often destroying the “do” in an effort to remove the insect.

In my opinion, (which among the women who sometimes rode in my cars never amounted to much) grasshoppers were the worst kind of intruder because they generally arrived with a thimbleful of “tobacco” juice in their systems. Add in their scratchy, long legs and their natural inclination to jump for safety and you can understand why so many old Fords ended up in someone’s cornfield or pasture when one of the car’s occupants was battling to evict a bug.

Due to an allergy to bee stings, my greatest fear is a stinging insect such as a hitchhiking bumblebee. Passage through an open vent window usually leaves a bee damaged enough that it cannot figure out just how to escape the car’s interior. Secondly, in the process of learning to fly with severely damaged wings and fuselages, bumblebees tend to sting anything that moves. For that reason, it is wise for anyone allergic to bee stings to keep some kind of antihistamine in their car’s glove box during the summer months. That’s cheaper than installing an air conditioner in an elderly vehicle. However, considering the excessive heat plaguing the country this year, one will certainly realize some worthwhile benefits by having a new A/C installed in his vintage machine. From what I have read “air” tends to increase the sale value of a vehicle if and (or) when you find it necessary to sell it. And, for those of you with the courage to undertake a CHVA sponsored National Tour, “vintage” air will make it more enjoyable.

Last year’s tour of Florida would have been far less pleasant had we not had an A/C installed in our 1967 Fairlane prior to the event. Remarkably, the new after-market compressors cause less gasoline consumption than the factory units installed in years past, something that last year’s fuel prices made me appreciate. Purists may decry the idea of modifying a vintage machine by adding anything that was not already installed on the car the day it rolled out of the factory. However, folks who own a truly “one of a kind” original machine are not likely to expose it to a long road trip in any case. Most of us would make exactly the same choice to preserve such a fine bit of history and expensive investment if ever we manage to acquire such a machine--even if it means using the old “Four and Forty” system to stay cool when using it.