

A VENT WINDOW VIEW  
*The Mystery of the Red Jeepster*  
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Most auto dealerships in the USA began to exhibit new models quite soon after the atomic boom ended WW II. In rural Missouri one of the most *noticeable* changes that followed war's end was the gradual appearance of new vehicles plying the many unpaved roads that provided access to rural residences amid Missouri's cornfields.

When the war ended, factories began to produce goods that civilians had gone without for much too long. The most obvious segment of peacetime manufacturing was taking place in Detroit where car makers began to produce automobiles rather than jeeps, tanks, and warplanes. The American public was more than ready to buy the new sedans, coupes, and convertibles that soon appeared wearing a growing range of colors and sporting options the citizenry had never before enjoyed.

My primary close up exposure to these colorful changes appeared in the fall of 1948. A shiny new red Jeepster had been parked in the front yard of the farmhouse located just across the dirt road that bordered the west side of the school's playground; that grassy area surrounded the one-room schoolhouse where my education was well underway. Mr. & Mrs. Penisson, the farm couple who lived in the small house located just across the dirt road that separated the schoolyard and the Penisson property, were seldom seen. There did not appear to be any animals on their place other than a squad of *white leghorn* chickens. The only building on the property, other than the house, was a small barn that sat a bit farther up the road from the Penisson residence.

None of us kids had ever before seen a Jeepster. For that matter, since none of us kids had ever seen a real firetruck or fire chief's vehicle, none of us had ever seen a vehicle dressed in red paint except for the peddle cars pictured in *Dick and Jane* books.

Somehow the sudden appearance of the red Jeepster parked in Mr. and Mrs. Penisson's front yard added yet another level of *curiosity* or even *mystery* to that seldom seen couple. Around our neighborhood it was generally supposed that Mr. Penisson was retired *but from what was another mystery*. Certainly, as far as making money farming, their acreage was too small to raise enough corn or wheat or hogs to turn a profit great enough to buy a car of any kind, let alone a new Jeepster. That added to the overall mystery about the Penisson duo because the vehicle was new. This had most of us kids wondering about their purchase of a new *anything!* After all, ownership of a new car was tantamount to shouting "Hey, look at me." For us boys, the Penisson's vehicle served as the main topic in most of our conversations for several weeks, much of it a stew of envy and jealousy. And, now, thinking back to those days, it is probable that all us kids (and the teacher) in grades six and higher suffered a growing curiosity about the Penisson's acquisition of the Jeepster.

In the weeks that followed V-J Day the "new" cars acquired by relatives and friends served to increase the hunger felt by the rest of the war-weary populace. Probably it was this appetite that led the folks in Detroit to suppose anything on wheels that smelled new was saleable in the postwar years. Of course, availability may have led to Mr. Pennison's choice, but all of us kids thought the dark red Jeepster with its exterior accentuated by its tan-colored fabric top was a beautiful car.

Less than a month later the Pennisons and their Jeepster disappeared. No one saw them leave and no one seemed to know where they had gone. Their little house sat empty for many years until the Pennison's little farmstead was eventually purchased by an adjoining land owner. The same occurred to the little schoolhouse and it, like the Pennison's residence, was demolished. To this day, whenever I see an abandoned one-room school, memories of that past age take over my mind like weeds in an unkempt garden. Mixed with those mind pictures of *school days past* I remember moments and sights such as the Pennison's Jeepster. Sadly, except for theirs, the Jeepster failed to gain much interest from car-hungry US citizens. My schoolmates and I were the exception to that group although, frankly, we were just as eager to learn what happened to the Pennisons.