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Dante's Ts

By Sophie Braccini



Dante Marchitello in his Model T Hot Rod Photo
Sophie Braccini

other two cars. One is a bright green Speedster Model T and the other one an orange Model T Hot Rod, both from the 1920's. "I bought the body of the Hot Rod in San Francisco," says Marchitello, "it hadn't run in 40 years, I restored it completely and have been taking it on the road." He remembers driving Highway 88 all the way from Jackson to Carson City for a show and the old car behaved quite well. The wooden wheels are originals, but Marchitello added motorcycle brakes for safety, "Model Ts didn't have much in the way of brakes," he says. He also added a gas pump to his truck; in the original design, the gasoline tank was located higher than the engine and relied on gravity to send the gas to the engine. "One day I had trouble just going up my driveway into my garage," explains Marchitello, "the gas was not reaching the engine anymore."

Marchitello's neighbor John Anderson, a car collector himself, has been urging him to show his cars in Moraga. "His cars are gorgeous and he restored them all himself," says Anderson, "He has not driven the green Speedster on the road yet; I would love to see him in this beautiful car." Two years ago Anderson partnered with Ravi Inder Singh, the manager of Rheem Valley Automotive, for the first Moraga Community Faire car show; the two are working together again this year for the 4th of July event. He plans to bring his 1954 Jaguar and possibly his custom Cadillac convertible.

"We have about a dozen cars registered for the show," says Inder Singh, "a Buick Roadster, a Ford Model A and a Chevy Corvette, among others, and we are still taking applications." The car show will take place at the Moraga Commons Park during the 4th of July celebrations, from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Those interested in showing their cars should contact Inder Singh at 377-6020 or by email to ravi@rheemauto.com.

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It is not hard for Dante Marchitello to drive a 1920's Model T; it just takes practice to get used to the four pedals (one for the gas throttle, added by Marchitello) that function quite differently from modern car. For more than 20 years now, the Moraga resident has been renovating three Model Ts in his home, and he takes two of them on the road whenever he can. "I just love having them, looking at them, restoring them and just driving something really old," he says, adding, "I will bring all three of them to the Moraga car show on July 4th."

A Model T vegetable truck, like the one Marchitello cares for, is a rare find. "They did everything with the Model T when it was produced," says the retired gentleman, "Ford would sell the frame and people would customize it as tractors, snow mobiles, to climb mountains or explore deserts. Farmers outfitted them to transport their products, inventing their own pick-up trucks." Attached inside the engine of the truck is a metal container, the size of a lunch box, labeled Model T cooker and bake. "It was an accessory that was developed for the car," says Marchitello, "you could cook your lunch on your way to work in that box!"

The truck gets a lot of attention at car shows, as do Marchitello's