

Marmon-Herrington Ford C5A – July/August 2014 Cover Story



Posted on [June 2, 2014](#) by [Patrick Ertel](#)



The 1937 Marmon-Herrington Ford C5A that appears on the cover of the [July/August 2014](#) issue of *Vintage Truck* magazine is a replica of a prototype truck Marmon-Herrington built for the U.S. Army. It was assembled by Don Chew, a veteran truck enthusiast and renowned historian of four-wheel-drive trucks.

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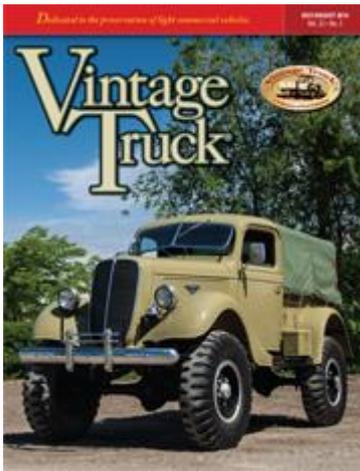
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Casualty of War

1937 Marmon-Herrington Ford C5A

Patrick Ertel's interview with Don Chew



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Don Chew is a veteran truck enthusiast and renowned historian of four-wheel-drive trucks. Over the past decade, he gathered the necessary parts and assembled a replica of a prototype truck Marmon-Herrington built for the U.S. Army. During my interview with Don in 2013, he divulged the story behind the original truck that inspired his replica.

Walter Marmon and Arthur Herrington formed the Marmon-Herrington Co. (M-H) in 1931 to build specialty four-wheel-drive trucks. Initially, the company built big trucks for the military and for the Iraq Petroleum Company, but they knew there was a market for smaller trucks. The other four-wheel-drive truck manufacturer, FWD, had cut the price of its smaller trucks to \$2,500. Walter Marmon knew he could not build a truck from the ground up to compete with that price; therefore, he would have to convert trucks that were already in production.

Marmon's nephew was the Ford dealer in Indianapolis, Indiana, so he had a foot in the door with Ford Motors. In 1935, Marmon and M-H Chief Engineer Robert "Bob" Wallace went to visit Henry and Edsel Ford to talk about Marmon's idea of converting Ford trucks to four-wheel drive. Art Herrington was in Iraq selling big M-H trucks, and when he came home in October, they had already built the prototype conversion. They took it to Ford for his engineers to test it. Everyone was impressed with the truck's abilities, but Ford took Herrington aside and said

he was already at production capacity supplying farmers with all the trucks they needed. He said if he started converting trucks at the end of the production line, it would slow production down, and he did not want that to happen.

M-H had the ability to convert fully assembled trucks, and Ford was happy to have its trucks converted to four-wheel drive for customers who needed it. To keep M-H engineers abreast of production changes, Ford agreed to send blueprints to M-H and let them know about any running changes and additions when Ford introduced new models. At that time, they were only converting 1½-ton trucks. By the time 1938 came around, M-H was modifying everything Ford made, from sedans to pickups to big trucks. All the conversions had to be done at the M-H factory in Indianapolis.

In 1984, Don Chew spent two weekends talking to former M-H Chief Engineer Bob Wallace, who told him the story of a unique truck built by Marmon-Herrington. In 1937, Herrington was in Antwerp trying to sell 1½-ton trucks to the Belgian army who told him they were looking for smaller trucks. The U.S. army was also looking for a small truck, and that is how the 1/4-ton Jeep came about. Nothing as small as a 1/4-ton was available in 1937, so Herrington sent a telegram back to the factory and told them to look into converting the half-ton Ford pickup. They put one up on a lift and determined that it would be relatively easy. Herrington told them to start on a prototype right away, and they finished it in September 1937. Production was approved, and they built approximately 15 trucks before the end of the year. Two of these 1937 pickups still exist.

In 1937, the U.S. Army advertised to truck manufacturers for a weapons carrier vehicle. Marmon-Herrington answered the request with a 1½-ton 4X4 truck with a 113-inch wheelbase—the same wheelbase as a half-ton pickup. It was heavier duty and would have been more expensive than the Dodges it was competing against. During the tests, it carried ammunition and pulled a field gun over all kinds of terrain. The Army tested the truck for a short time and in a report raved that it outperformed all other candidates and excelled in all tests. M-H returned to the factory with the truck and the glowing report. However, the last two sentences of the report stated that if the truck was disabled on the road, two men could not get it out of the way. Though it was unlikely that the Army ever found a truck of this size that two men could push out of the way. Between that “failure” and the decision that the truck cost too much, the Army passed on the opportunity to put this truck in its arsenal.

Herrington took the truck to Europe and by September 1939 obtained orders from Belgium and the Netherlands. World War II started before he could get the truck back home, and all orders were cancelled. No civilian orders were ever acquired and the truck design languished.

During the 1980s, Don found three photos of this prototype truck. In 2002, he began collecting parts to assemble a replica. The truck he used for the basis was originally owned by the fire department in Clear Lake, Iowa. It was given to them when the Ford dealer could not sell it in 1937. In the early 1980s, a subsequent owner left it sitting outside without antifreeze, and during the first cold night it

froze and the block cracked. A new engine was found in Iowa City and installed, but it was never run much and had less than 50 miles on it. Truck collector Lloyd Van Horn of Mason City acquired the Ford and kept it until he closed the Van Horn Truck Museum and offered it to Don. Ten years later, Don completed his Marmon-Herrington Ford model C5A serial #2. The bumper and other external features on it are based on the photos of the original truck.

Don took the truck to the Alaska (Alcan) Highway 70th anniversary convoy event in 2012, but he did not drive it on the highway much because the convoy was going more than 45 mph. The truck is complete and drives fine, but it has some rough edges, and Don said, "I need to take it all apart and reassemble it real nice."

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