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A B R I E F  
**HISTORY**  
OF THE  
FERRELL FAMILY  
**1947**  
**CHRYSLER**  
TOWN & COUNTRY  
CONVERTIBLE

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BY JOHN FERRELL

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THE FIRST OWNER OF THIS CAR WAS THE O.J. FERRELL FAMILY OF STERLING, COLORADO. STERLING IS A SMALL RURAL TOWN IN THE NORTHEASTERN CORNER OF THE STATE AND IS PRINCIPALLY A FARMING AND RANCHING COMMUNITY. OLLIE JENNINGS (O.J.) FERRELL WAS BORN IN GALLATIN, TENNESSEE ON AUGUST 13, 1896 TO A SMALL FARMING FAMILY. HE GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL IN GALLATIN AND ATTENDED VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY IN NASHVILLE FOR THREE

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years but never graduated. During the Great Depression he had a variety of jobs including selling Real Silk hosiery from door-to-door in St. Louis, Missouri. At one point in the mid- to late-1930s while working for the Coca-Cola Company in St. Louis, he was offered a job as the manager of the Coca-Cola bottling plant in Sterling, Colorado. He took the job and came to Sterling in 1938.

On Christmas day 1940 he married a local girl 23 years his junior, Helen May Weir. The Ferrells had two boys, Allen, born January 30, 1942 and John, born April 4, 1944. Mr. Ferrell somehow saved money for a new car and wanted a convertible. By that time he had made friends with Mr. George Cassell who owned the local Chrysler dealership and with Mr. Bill Pospicil who owned the Cadillac and Oldsmobile dealerships. The War had ended and cars were in short supply. Allen Ferrell remembers going to the Ford garage with his father O. J. and seeing a new Ford that had wooden bumpers due to lack of steel availability.

Mr. Ferrell ordered a new Chrysler convertible and a new Oldsmobile convertible from each of the dealers with the understanding that he would purchase whichever one arrived first. The Chrysler made it first and it came on a train car to the town of Sydney, Nebraska (about 40 miles away). Mr. Ferrell went to Sydney to pick it up and drove it back to Cassell Motors where it went on display for about a week. It was during Easter of 1947 and the car was in the center of the showroom with a white picket fence around it. Easter baskets with



colored eggs and candy were placed along the fence as part of the display. O. J. took Helen May and his sons Allen and John to see the car. Its color was called Trumpet Gold which was a “special order” paint color offered by Chrysler at the time. The price of the vehicle was reported to be \$2,713 which in current dollars would be more than \$29,000. Whether the purchase was done on credit is not clear. There were only 2,651 Town & Countrys produced in 1947.

The Ferrells eventually took the car home to the small house south of Sterling. The house sat on 15 acres that were used sometimes as pastures for the Ferrell livestock and were sometimes sub-rented by Mr. Ferrell to local farmers who would grow corn or hay. O. J. Ferrell

was adamant that the car be kept in the garage, so the heavy sliding door to the garage had to be muscled back and forth to get the car in and out. The car, which O. J. affectionately always referred to as “Old Betsy” was, at least in the early years, the family’s pride and joy. The family had modest means, the car being the only material possession of any real value.

At one point Mr. Ferrell took the car to the Coca-Cola plant and parked it too closely to the railroad tracks. A train sideswiped it, resulting in some damage to the metal parts but fortunately, the wood was not damaged. Mr. Ferrell had it fixed right away, most likely at the Cassell Motor Company in Sterling. The car was never involved in another accident during the time the Ferrells

owned it. Mr. Ferrell did take the car to Denver a few times to have the wood refinished. The varnish on the wood tended to peel after a few years and the red panels would fade out, so they were re-stained and

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**OPPOSITE PAGE LEFT TO RIGHT**

- > Ollie Jennings Ferrell at Coca-Cola plant Sterling, Colorado, circa 1939.
- > The Ferrell home near Sterling, Colorado, circa 1959.

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- > Helen May Ferrell with the Ferrell’s first car, circa 1941.
- > Helen May Ferrell with her nephew, sons Allen and John, and mother Josephine Weir with the 1947 Chrysler, circa 1950.
- > John and Allen Ferrell with “Old Betsy,” circa 1949.



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all of the wood re-varnished. This work was done at Cullen Thompson Chrysler at 1000 Broadway in Denver.

Allen Ferrell remembers that the canvas top was replaced as it had faded significantly and believes that this was done by a tent and awning company in Sterling. Allen also recalls

that his mother, Helen May, took the car to one of her sorority meetings in Sterling. A major hail storm was predicted and it became threatening so Mr. Ferrell went into town with the two boys in the family pick-up and brought the car back home and put it into the garage. The hail turned out to be significant and the car would have been severely damaged had he not rescued it from the elements.

Another incident involved the space behind the back seat where there was a large well into which the convertible top folded. This was a great nesting place for cats while the car was in the garage. One Sunday morning upon arriving at the Presbyterian church, a mother cat popped up and had delivered a batch of kittens in the car. Needless to say, there was a quick turnaround trip and no church visit that morning.

O. J. Ferrell was active in community affairs and for many years was the marshal of the parade during the annual Logan County Fair Parade and Rodeo. In that capacity he often entered the car in the parade and more than once Helen May drove the car with the governor of Colorado (Dan Thornton) sitting in the car as an honorary parade official. He always wore a big cowboy hat for the occasion.

The Ferrells took a vacation only every two years at Christmas time when they would drive the car from Sterling, Colorado to Gallatin, Tennessee to visit O. J.'s family. O. J. and Helen May would drive and Allen and John would be huddled in the back seat with blankets around them. Between it being winter and the fact that the car was a convertible, those were chilly trips. This was prior to the interstate highway system and all the driving was done on two-way highways. Fortunately, the Town & Countrys were great "road cars", big and with plenty of suspension so the ride was fairly comfortable. O. J. was, shall we say, a frugal man and his goal was to get to Tennessee in as short a time and at as little a cost as possible. There was a significant amount of night driving and the trip usually involved three nights in various economy motels before reaching Tennessee.

As kids, Allen and John Ferrell eventually became somewhat tired of the car and they began rather ungraciously to refer to as



the "Covered Wagon." The Ferrells still had the car when Allen was in high school and he remembers that it was really enjoyable to drive. It featured "Fluid Drive", an early version of an automatic transmission.

By 1959 the car was in pretty bad shape and Mr. Ferrell simply had it towed to what was in effect a country junkyard in the Sterling area. Years later it was thankfully rescued as follows:

One of the well-known farmer/ranchers in the area north of Sterling was a man named Al Miller. Almost certainly Al Miller was acquainted with the Ferrell family since Sterling was a fairly small community and O.J. Ferrell was somewhat prominent in civic affairs. The car had ended up in a "wash" (or perhaps an irrigation ditch) on property belonging to Mr. Miller. It was in terrible shape since it had been exposed to the elements for many years. Water and weather had ruined the wood and many of the parts such as door handles and radio knobs had been removed. Basically, it was a cannibalized wreck.

A gentleman by the name of Louis Chance was visiting the Sterling area and noticed the old car on Al's property. Louis asked Al if he could have it to take back to Denver to work on as a retirement project. Al agreed and the car was shipped to Denver around 1978.



OPPOSITE PAGE

> O.J. and Helen May Ferrell in Sterling, Colorado, circa 1980.

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> The Trumpet Gold paintwork provides a subtle tonal contrast to the wood trim.



Louis Chance had retired as the manager of the Woolworth Store in Denver, at the time the largest Woolworth store in the world. Over many years he had built the business into a very successful operation but upon retirement felt that he needed a hobby. Restoring the Chrysler became that hobby and for the next two years he and his wife Pauline and their daughters Alexis and Carol Jean combed junkyards looking for the needed parts. In the days before the internet, finding old car parts was a laborious process. Louis found an experienced woodworker in Denver who undertook the job of carefully recrafting the car's wood features.

After the restoration was completed, the Chance family enjoyed it for a few years but eventually stopped driving it and it simply sat in storage at the Chance home in Denver. When Louis died in 2001 the family offered the car for sale at the same time that they held a

garage sale to dispose of other belongings. Many people came, not necessarily to buy something at the garage sale, but rather merely to take a look at the car. Two of the visitors were Bill and Julie Ebeling, also of Denver. The day they bought it they found that the car would not start so they gently pushed it down the Chance's inclined driveway. It started and "purred like a kitten" according to daughter Alexis. The year was 2001.

Mrs. Luann Esposito of Encinitas, California bought the car from the Eblings in 2006. The Espositos are active in the San Diego "Woody" association called Wavecrest and they enjoyed the car for many years, having shown it at several association meetings and parades.

John Cage Ferrell of Sausalito, California (son of the original owner O.J. Ferrell) bought the car from Luann Esposito on December 18, 2015. This Town & Country had come full circle.

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