

BITS & PIECES

La "Chivita" De Pedro

By Louie Celerier, February 2015

Within the family, we remember my cousin's, Pedro Gonzalez, WW II period vehicle very well. It was a 1931 Ford Model A with a home-made station wagon body, painted Navy Gray, which we called "La Chivita". Those who know the transportation system of Panama in the days prior to the 1950s remember well the little home-made buses made on small truck frames and which were called "Chivas". La Chivita would be a small chiva.



L-R: A Ford wagon similar to La Chivita de Pedro and the real Chivita at El Valle with curtains down.

This "Chivita" came equipped with two doors only, three rows of seats, a spare tire inside on the left side of the third seat, roll down black oilcloth curtains to keep the rain out and a pull down tail gate for luggage. The windshield opened up for ventilation, the one windshield wiper had to be operated manually, the gas tank was right in front of the instrument panel and the spark advance lever was on the steering wheel. The one Pedro bought for \$50.00 in 1942 was not in as good a shape as the one on the photo above. But it ran very well.

This was one of our means of transportation to El Valle. The normal passenger load would be Pedro and his wife Nimia, his mother Angelica, his aunt Isabel, my father Louis, my mother Blanca, myself, sometimes my sister and/or a cousin (Mary Lea, Frank or Luis Carlos). World War II having started, rationing of tires and gasoline were in effect. Now, in those days most businesses were opened on Saturday mornings so we would not be able to leave for El Valle before 1:00 PM and with the roads not being the best, and finding U.S. Army convoys on the way, if no other interruptions took place, we could be at our place in El Valle by 4:00 PM. But that was usually not the case. Flats were a constant companion and we spent many hours by the side of the road changing tires and patching old tubes.

I remember one particular trip. Leaving the house we saw my older cousin Francisco "Toño" Azcarraga. As he waved "good-bye" he said, "And I hope you have four flats!" Well, we had four going. We got to El Valle late that night and the next morning, Sunday, Pedro spent all the morning patching tubes so we could make it back. We headed back to the city leaving right after lunch and had an additional two flats; the last one being the end of the repair materials. Fortunately we were by the farm of Julia Joiner, my mother's cousin and we left la Chivita there. Part of our group piled into Julia's car and the rest sat

by the side of the road to hitch-hike. Lucky for us, other relatives had been out to the country that week-end and they gave the rest of us a ride home. Toño did not show his face around us for more than a month!

Because of rationing, the gasoline used for the trip was from saving coupons for days in order to get one tankful. This was enough to get us to El Valle and almost back home, but not quite. It was always necessary to stop in La Chorrera to buy one or two gallons of kerosene which, mixed with the remaining but of gasoline, provided the necessary fuel to complete the journey.

Pedro taught me how to drive in La Chivita. I have fond memories of that vehicle and our Odysseys in it to El Valle.

Louie Celerier
Longview, Texas

February 2015



*La Chivita going up the mountain road to El Valle
in mid-1940s*