



1927 Franklin 11B Sedan: Better Dressed But Not Too Flashy

By ERIC TEGLER on 7/22/2010

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The 1927 Franklin 11B Sedan

By the mid-1920s, American consumers could agree that Franklins were well-engineered cars. But they were a little odd-looking. The "horse-collar" hood style of the early-'20s Series 10 Franklins, with aft-tilted grille, made perfect sense to chief engineer John Wilkinson. His air-cooled engines didn't require the upright-radiator profile of their competitors. But Franklin dealers, particularly on the West Coast, began asking if the company could make its cars more conventional-looking--better dressed but not too flashy.

That was a good description of the average upper-middle-class Franklin buyer. Wilkinson opposed putting form above function, but he left the company in 1924. In his place, Franklin hired former Rolls-Royce and Locomobile designer Frank de Causse, who penned a body style for the Series 11 that incorporated what has been called the "de Causse hood." The Series 11 debuted in 1925, and its aluminum body on a laminated ash-wood frame was handsome, right down to its vertical radiator grille and four-piece hood.

This 1927 11B's body was built by Walker Body of Amesbury, Mass. It was a drab olive color when David Phillips of Linthicum, Md., acquired it in 1992. He had it redone in this maroon-and-black two-tone, in keeping with Franklin's practice of offering custom paintwork. Phillips liked the fact that 1927 was the last Franklin model year for mechanical brakes. His 11B stops courtesy of a large circular band that clamps a drum behind the transmission, slowing the rear wheels through the differential.

"When you step on the pedal, that band is contracting right under the floor. You can hear it," Phillips explains.

The big Franklin, with its 119-inch wheelbase, decelerates admirably and steers even better with low effort, thanks to a steering box that later would be prized by 1950s midget racers. Its three-speed, nonsynchro gearbox is matched with a 4.72:1 rear end, which encourages you to double-clutch up to third quickly and leave it there. The 11B's 199-cubic-inch straight-six came with Series 9 cars but benefited from improved intake and exhaust manifolds and Stromberg OE-2 carburetors. It is rated at 35 hp, and its air-cooling is aided by a blower at the front, which forces air via ductwork downward over the cylinders' vertical cooling fins.

Full elliptical springs all around provide a cushy ride. The front and rear benches are comfy settees, although front passengers get squeezed by the emergency brake. From the back seat, you can see the body taper forward, putting the pair in front shoulder-to-shoulder. Either can read the needle/drum gauges or grip the wooden steering wheel.

At 40 mph, the Franklin feels great. Rest your arm on the windowsill, dial up Bix Beiderbecke on the ol' iPod, and follow the pawing lion on the radiator cap. But don't be too flashy about it.

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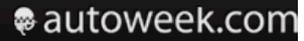
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