

Farewell to Model T * From Sea to Shining Sea

By E.B. White

The Little Bookroom Press, New York, 2003

34 pages: includes two essays, "Farewell To Model T" (1936) and "From Sea to Shining Sea" (1953), B&W photos.

by Paul Duncan

Book Review

Many of us learned English grammar in college from a text book, *The Elements of Style*. The authors are William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White. William Strunk was a Professor of English at Cornell University and E.B. White was his student who became a famous man of letters honored with a Pulitzer Prize and Presidential Medal of Freedom. He wrote for the *New Yorker* for many years and also published several popular children's books, including *Charlotte's Web* (1952.)

In 1922, after graduation from Cornell, E.B. purchased a Model T Roadster and headed west with a "likeminded" college friend. They ended their journey in Seattle where E.B. lived for a number of years and was a writer for *The Seattle Times* newspaper. E.B. was a life-time owner of a Model T. He and his wife Katherine are pictured on the jacket of the book driving their 1923 Model T roadster near their home in Brooklin, Maine in about 1940.

This little book of only 34 pages packs a powerful literary punch. In the book are included two of E.B. White's short essays originally published in the *New Yorker* magazine. The first essay "Farewell to Model T" was published in 1936 at a time when Model T's were beginning to disappear from America's highways. The second essay, "From Sea to Shining Sea" was published in 1953 and recalled his 1922 cross-country road trip from New York to Seattle in a Model T.

In "Farewell to Model T" E.B. wastes no words getting to the point. "I see by the new Sears Roebuck

catalogue that it is still possible to buy an axle for a 1909 Model T Ford, but I am not deceived. The great days have faded, the end is in sight."

This essay, in my opinion, is best read aloud. Model T drivers will understand the descriptions. Non-Model T drivers can also appreciate the language and

might be tempted to learn more about Model Ts. For example, he describes the Model T transmission with the explanation that, "The Model T was distinguished from all other makes of cars by the fact that its transmission was a type known as planetary--which was half metaphysic, half sheer friction." In another quote he commented that "The Ford driver flew blind. He didn't know the temperature of his engine, the speed of his car, the amount of fuel or the pressure of his oil."

In his essay, "From Sea to Shining Sea" E.B. described his 1922 trip across the United States with these words. "I located America thirty-one years ago in a Model T Ford and planted my flag. I've tried a couple of time

since to find it again in faster cars and better roads, but America is the sort of place that is discovered only once by any one man."

E. B. knew the Model T intimately. Do not miss reading these essays if you enjoy your Model T or stories about Model T's. His words are timeless!

