

# EDSEL FORD AND A 1915 MODEL T – AUTOMOTIVE ARCHAEOLOGY



Mark Gessler and the team from the Historic Vehicle Association of America called in to Stanford's Revs Program today on their epic trip from Detroit to San Francisco in a 1915 Model T Ford [Link]



*(Click on the photos for full evocative resolution)*

They're following the tracks of Edsel Ford who took a Model T just like this across America to visit the great world fair in San Francisco a century ago in 1915 – the Panama Pacific International Exposition. This was the first well-documented road trip – a phenomenon that became such a feature of the modern culture of mobility.

The point? This trip urges us to think and remember. And it's a call to action.

Beyond the many auto enthusiasts and collectors, little rigorous attention and resource is being devoted to the automotive history embedded in the cars that still survive. Automotive heritage, with all the valency and awkwardness of that term "heritage", is still largely a hobby. Go to a main resource for researching America's history, the Library of Congress web site, and you'll find virtually no guidance on automotive history. Yet the automobile was the defining material culture component of twentieth century life. The challenges of moving beyond a carbon-based economy are rooted in a century of devotion to the internal combustion engine. The addiction to mobility is evolving with new media devices like smartphones, pocketable packs of information and communications technology that offer vastly augmented reach and connectivity. And the autonomy offered by the automobile is evolving with a new kind of robotic autonomy – the self-driving car.

This is why we need **automotive archaeology** – to gain rigorous perspective on what’s facing us now and in the future as mobility evolves.

And here I suggest we witness the power of **theatre/archaeology** in this archaeology of the contemporary past – the rearticulation of fragments of the past as real-time event. (This is much more than re-enactment.)



Everyone wants to take a ride



Mark impresses upon Chris Gerdes, automotive engineer and director of Stanford's Center for Automotive Research (CARS), the significance of the trip



Old and new – the Model T by Stanford’s state-of-the-art solar-powered car in the Automotive Innovation Facility



Who can resist the allure of this most robust and characterful technology? – with Mark Gessler and me at the wheel

Here's my short summary for the press – saying why this trip matters.

This remarkable adventure in an original 1915 Model T Ford, following in the tracks of Edsel Ford's road trip across America a century ago, from Detroit's modern factories to the Panama Pacific World Fair in San Francisco, offers a vital reminder and call to action. A reminder that of the freedom and autonomy bestowed upon the twentieth century by the automobile, as that very freedom and autonomy evolves with new kinds of

mobile technology – smartphones and now the autonomous self driving robot car. And a call to action – we are not doing enough to care for the the cars and experiences that have so shaped the last century and more. Automotive history matters – with a perspective fixed on a future of imagined innovation we might forget where we have come from. For what would any of us be without the memories and pasts present that make us who we are?

