

Photographs by Tom Strongman

John Barnes drives his beautifully restored Whippet across the grounds at Kansas City's Art Institute.

The Barneses' 1929 Whippet goes from derelict to prizewinner

Sometimes you can barely see a car for the tree that grows through it.

Gerald Shaver of Lamar, Mo., found this 1929 Willys-Overland Whippet 96A in a fence row in the woods in Grove, Okla. A tree was in the middle of it, and it had to be cut down to get the car free. Shaver bought the pieces of the car and brought it to Missouri. John and Helen Barnes of Mound City, Kan., then bought it from him in 1979.

GALLERY



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The couple planned to restore the car, but life events intervened. The person renting their farmland declared bankruptcy and their income disappeared. For the next 25 years, the Whippet sat in an old chicken house on their farm.

After traveling and getting kids through college, the Barneses turned their attention to the Whippet. A body was discovered at a swap meet, although it had been sawed in half to be used as a sign by a body shop in



A whippet dog adorns the top of the radiator.

John took the car's pieces to George and Charley Shaver in Liberal, Mo. The Shavers had to make many of the pieces from scratch, while others were bought online. Noel Jurgens of Mound City rebuilt the engine, which is original. The car was completed in April.

The Whippet 96A is an unusual car. Only 21 are known to be registered in this country. Production began in October 1928. It



John and Helen Barnes have had the Whippet since 1979.

had a 103.25-inch wheel-base, a 40-horsepower engine and a top speed of 60 miles per hour. The wheels are wood, and a whippet dog sits atop the radiator cap.

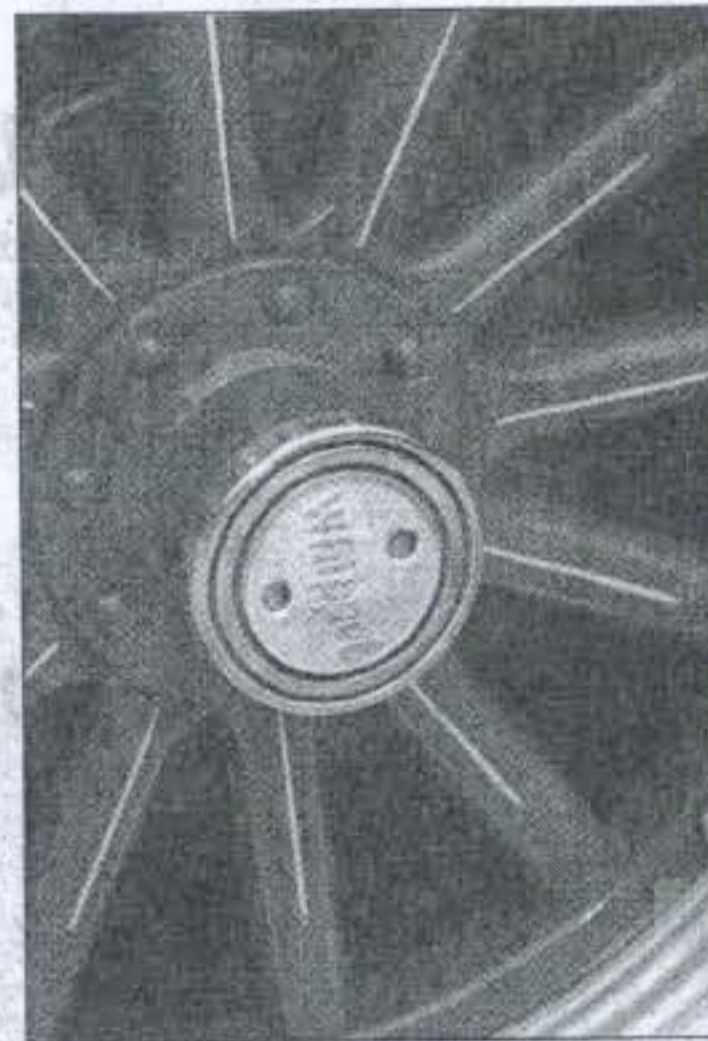
The Whippet was unique in that the steering column had controls for the starter, horn, headlights and parking lights.

In June the Barneses displayed their car at the Art of the Car Concours at the Kansas City Art In-

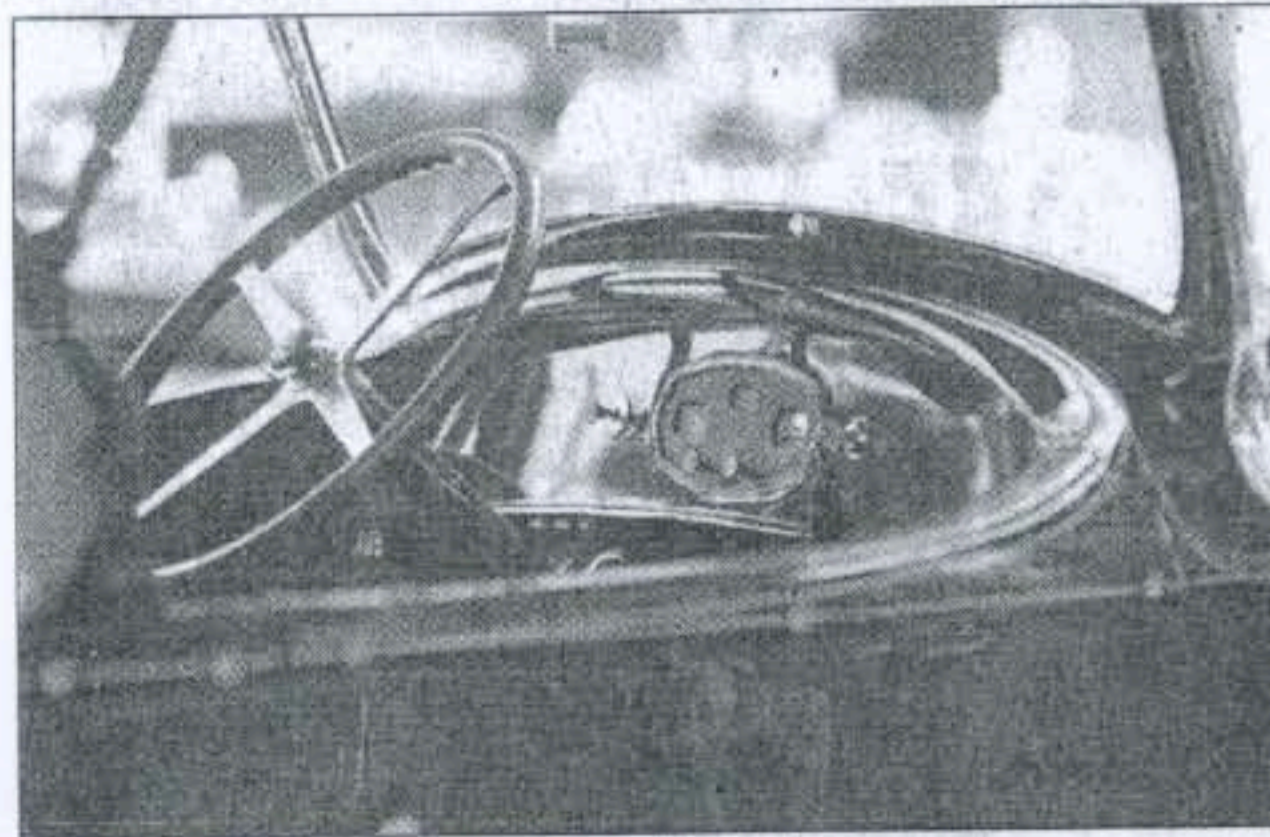
stitute. They dressed in period clothes, despite the sweltering temperatures, and clearly enjoyed themselves as they sat under a tree and visited with people who admired their car. As Helen said, while wearing a long black dress and a fur neckpiece, "It's never too hot for fur."

The culmination of the show was winning the Chairman's Choice award.

"That was great," John said. "Helen really likes the trophy, and we'd be happy if we never won another."



The wheels are wooden.



The steering wheel contains controls for the starter, horn, headlights and parking lights.