

Classic Truck Makes Long Trip Home

By Crickett Gibbons

A 1917 Model T truck is back with its original owners after traveling from California to Indianapolis. The journey started after a sharp-eyed employee forwarded an unexpected email to Indiana Oxygen CEO Wally Brant.

The owner “knew he had our truck,” Brant relates, “but he didn’t know anything about us. It was only when he was ready to sell it that he thought maybe the original owners would want it.” So the Arroyo Grande, California, resident sent a note to the company’s general email address inquiring if the business still existed.

By comparing current photos of the truck with historical ones at the company, Brant was reassured that the vehicle was originally owned by Indiana Oxygen. “My dad and grandfather were both very good at photo

documenting various stages of our history,” he remarks, sharing details about the truck’s use and the 103-year-old company’s past.

“We bought it new in 1917. It was our second delivery truck, and it was actually not so much of a delivery truck as a sales truck. In the back we had gas cylinders, but we also had torches, regulators, welding rods and so forth to demonstrate what welding was. We were the very first welding supply and gas company in the state of Indiana. So being the first, we were also the only. . . . Our competitors were blacksmiths.”

Along with photos, the seller provided a couple of facts about the company’s early years that Brant asserts wouldn’t be available through research, but originally had been painted on the truck.

C.P. Brant, Wally’s great-grandfather, was listed as company president even though he never worked for the company. He loaned his sons and company founders Walter and John money and was officially president until the funds were repaid.

The California seller, who wishes to

remain anonymous according to Brant, contends that he acquired the vehicle after trading his high school teacher two acetylene lanterns from an early Model T for the truck in 1968. He painted over the Indiana Oxygen name, the company president’s name and its first address, which was vacated in 1930.

The owner also removed the box on the back to make it into a pickup truck. Brant says he plans to restore the box on the flatbed, but isn’t sure whether the entire vehicle will be refurbished or left as is before it’s parked in the company’s showroom near one of Chip Ganassi’s race cars. (Indiana Oxygen has partnered with Indianapolis Motor Speedway since the company’s start and has provided all of the welding services on the race cars at IMS since 1965, Brant asserts.)

Regarding the sale, Brant believes money wasn’t the driving factor. “He (the owner) was more interested in trying to make a connection,” Brant asserts. “I could tell he was more interested in making sure it had a good home rather than trying to squeeze every dollar out of the deal.”



Then and now: Historic photos helped Indiana Oxygen CEO Wally Brant confirm a 1917 Model T in California was one of the company’s original trucks.

RESOURCE: Wally Brant, Indiana Oxygen, at www.IndianaOxygen.com