

1967 Oren Fire Truck

By Randy Higgins

In early 2000 I had some money burning a hole in my pocket and wanted to purchase an old fire truck to use in parades and other events. After a year of browsing classified ads I stumbled across a 1967 Ford F-750 pumper located near Roanoke, VA.

I really liked the looks of the old Ford's and 1967 was the first year that F-series used this styling. You can always tell a '67 because the emblem on the sides of the hood do not have an amber reflector like subsequent years do.

Arriving at the fire house in the little town of Simmonsville, VA, high in the mountains of Craig County near the West Virginia border, I got my first glance at the rig. Surprisingly, it was still in *active* service after 33 years. The truck presented nicely but it needed a good overall cleaning.

It only had 19k miles showing on the odometer. Breaking the mileage down, that is only 575 miles per year! But, keep in mind, that whenever a fire truck is sitting stationary while pumping water the odometer is still ticking off miles! Many of the miles were not even actual road miles.

During the test drive we stopped at a local stream where the chief demonstrated that the rig could still draft and flow water from a static water source. After seeing first-hand how well it drove and pumped I made an offer for the purchase which was accepted.

After completing the deal, which literally consisted of a hand-written note on a napkin along with a handshake, we set off for the long drive back to Manassas.

I need to mention that the route into Simmonsville was the steepest road that I have ever negotiated in the State of Virginia, or quite possibly anywhere else. It had intimidating ninety-degree switchback turns that seemed to go on forever.

I did not want to try coming down the mountain with a 14,000-pound fire truck with brakes that I had no idea would be sufficient! Fortunately, the Chief gave me alternate directions out of town which took me through West Virginia and into Radford, VA. It added an hour to our trip home, but I didn't have to go down that mountain!

We traveled I-81 to I-66 all the way from Radford to Manassas with no issues. It was a great drive. At least a half dozen State Troopers and local police drove by and

gave us a quick honk, “blip” of the siren or waved at us. That was a relief since we didn’t have tags or a title at this point.

The rig was built in October 1967 by Oren Roanoke Corp. in Vinton, VA, and carries serial number 2420. It is equipped with a 750 gallon-per-minute two-stage Waterous fire pump. It also carries 500 gallons of water in an on-board water tank. The F-750 chassis has a 361 cid “Y” block V8, a 5 speed transmission and a two-speed rear axle.

It was originally delivered to the Fairlawn VFD in Radford, VA. After serving for over twenty years it was sold to the Simmonsville VFD where it served them until we acquired it.

After getting the rig home, I had it re-lettered to represent the markings used on Arlington County fire apparatus in the 60’s. I had a copy of the actual list of equipment carried on Arlington County fire apparatus in the late 60’s and used that to outfit the rig as authentically as possible using vintage equipment from Arlington.

I decided that the single pot brake master cylinder was not to my liking. I raided a 1968 F series school bus for the dual master cylinder and both hydro-vac units. I had them rebuilt and installed the dual system on the rig with a hydro-vac unit for the front and rear. This required a lot of time and brake line fabrication work, but the results were definitely worth it. The brakes on the rig will bring it to a stop with little effort.

The rear brake cylinders and axle seals were also replaced. This required the purchase of a suitably rated jack and jack stands. I was shocked by the extreme weight of the tire/wheel assemblies and the cast iron Dayton hubs.

The rig has participated in fire service events and parades in Harrisburg, PA, Winchester, VA, Timonium, MD, Alexandria, VA, Fairfax City, VA, Arlington, VA, Washington, DC, Falls Church, VA, and all throughout the Manassas/Prince William area. It has regularly participated in the Bull Run Chapter AACA show each September.

One of the highlights for the Oren was following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. The Arlington County Fire Department was invited to participate in the 2001 Manassas Christmas Parade. The fire chief asked me if I would use the Oren to carry the members that had served at the Pentagon on September 11 and the weeks that followed. It was a great honor to be able to do that. Seeing the people along the parade route standing, saluting, waving their American flags and crying left quite an impression.

On a more somber note the Oren has served as the funeral caisson for Arlington firefighter Lloyd Coleman who died in the line of duty in 2006. It also carried my Dad, Frank R. Higgins, to his final resting place at Arlington National Cemetery. Long-time Arlington Firefighters Robert Lee and Robert Gill also took their final rides on the Oren.

The Oren was also used at my wedding and my daughter's wedding to deliver us to the reception in style with the red lights and siren blaring!

Recently I had the Oren re-lettered to represent my other passion, *The Andy Griffith Show*. I have been a huge fan of the show for as long as I can remember and decided I wanted to change direction with the Oren and have some fun with a Mayberry themed tribute fire truck. The last Manassas Christmas parade was the debut for the new Mayberry livery, and everyone loved it! I can't recount how many people asked, "Where's Barney" or "Goober Says Hey".

The Oren has been a fun vehicle to own for the last 18 years and I look forward to many more years of fun with it.



Shown here wearing Arlington County Fire Department livery, Randy's Oren is an attraction at many parades



Randy and Liz's granddaughter, Madison, graces the Oren at the 2018 Manassas Christmas parade. Note the new "Mayberry" livery honoring the old TV show with Andy Griffith, another of Randy's passions.



Randy at far left with fellow Arlington County Firefighters and his Oren



Newlyweds, Randy and wife, Liz, riding on the Oren to their reception in Warrenton in 2013.