

Randy Rundle – Fifth Avenue Antique Auto

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

It's the opening ceremony of the Pan American Games. Down the street comes a special dignitary: the Queen of England in a vintage 1951 Cadillac limousine. When that car was rebuilt, where do you suppose they found the necessary expertise? Would you believe, at a shop in the middle of rural Kansas? Thanks to Michelle Tessaro of KCLY radio for this story idea. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Randy Rundle is owner of Fifth Avenue Antique Auto Parts in Clay Center. His unique auto shop is helping power antique vehicles that travel coast to coast, and even carry the Queen.

At age twelve, Randy became fascinated with antique Chevy trucks. While in school, he started buying, repairing, and selling these vehicles.

These trucks used a six-volt electrical system which would later be replaced by a twelve-volt alternator system in newer models built by the car-makers. Unfortunately those alternators only worked on the twelve-volt system, not the older models. “I decided all of those six-volt vehicles needed fixing and I was just the guy to do it,” Randy said.

After lots of research and tinkering in the shop, Randy devised a reliable six-volt alternator system which could successfully replace the older style system. In 1987, Randy opened Fifth Avenue Antique Auto Parts to market these products in his hometown of Clay Center. His storefront displays an actual front end of a yellow 1949 Chevrolet – with working headlights and auto horn!

To promote his new six-volt alternator, Randy got involved with the Great Race, an annual vintage car rally in which pre-1940 cars are driven 4,500 miles across the United States in just two weeks time. Of course, those cars used the old six-volt system.

Randy got a driver to try his new alternator and the, um, race was on. In 1991, Fifth Avenue Antique Auto Parts provided a New York driver and his 1929 Dodge Sport Roadster with Randy's alternator. That car won the Great Race in 1993. Having proven his six-volt alternator, Randy went on to solve cooling and fuel-related problems at the request of other Great Race teams. Since then, Randy has developed more than 40 specialized products to make all types of antique vehicles more reliable and fun to drive.

Watching the Great Race was a Hollywood movie director. He ended up using Randy's improvements for antique cars in movies such as *Devil in a Blue Dress*, *Lolita*, *LA Confidential* and *Indiana Jones*.

Another spectator at the Great Race was a representative of the British Crown. Randy got a call from someone identifying himself as the Royal Minister of Transportation, stating that he was requesting Randy's services on behalf of the Queen of England. "Yeah, right," Randy thought. "Which one of my buddies put this guy up to this?"

But the call was for real. As part of the Queen's participation in the 48th anniversary of the Pan American Games opening ceremony, she wanted to ride in the same 1951 Cadillac limousine in which she had ridden with her mother at the very first opening ceremony. Randy helped restore and rebuild this automobile in which the Queen successfully took her ride. He would later receive a note from the Queen on palace stationery, thanking Randy for his services to the Royal Family.

In 2012, the owner of an orange grove in California had a problem with the engines on his wind machines which are used to protect the oranges from winter frost. The repair for those engines was provided by Fifth Avenue Antique Auto Parts.

Now Randy is celebrating 25 years in business. He has customers in all 50 states, every Canadian province and sixteen foreign countries. Wow.

That's a remarkable accomplishment for a business in the rural community of Clay Center, population 4,525 people. Now, that's rural.

For more information, go to
www.fifthaveinternetgarage.com.

It's time to leave the Queen of England and the royal car which was restored with help from a business in the middle of Kansas. We commend Randy Rundle of Fifth Avenue Antique Auto Parts for making a difference with his expertise and innovation. For rural Kansas, it's a crowning achievement.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.