

## April Showers Bring May Flowers - Spring Tour 2011

By Anne Kenney & Tom Kenney

"You should have been here yesterday!" We heard that comment all day Saturday, April 16<sup>th</sup>, on the Chesapeake Region's Spring Tour. Of course, they were referring to the weather. It rained on and off all day, but that didn't dampen the spirits of the ninety-seven car enthusiasts who rode in forty-three cars. Ten were antiques!

The Tour started at the home of Janet and George Merkel in Bowie, MD. Their nine-acre spread showcased a collection of tractors and early Fords. Inside one of the their barns they had the biggest donuts you ever saw. By the time the last car departed on the tour, very few donuts were left!

The next stop on the Tour was the museum collection at the home of Sue and Cliff Jenkins in Brandywine, MD. They also had snacks and treats for the hardy travelers. In addition to the classic cars on display, Cliff proudly demonstrated his early Victrola.

The Tour's next feature was a back roads journey to the Jug Bay Area of Patuxent River State Park. A box lunch was served at the park's Gun Club House overlooking the Patuxent River.

After lunch, we visited the museum complex, which featured a log cabin, blacksmith and farrier shop, Sears & Roebuck house, and two museums. One museum housed the W. Henry Duvall Tool Collection. The other told

the story of Maryland tobacco farming.

Only the hardiest of souls completed the last part of the Tour along the Critical Area Driving Tour, a four-mile route connecting the park with the Merkle Wildlife Sanctuary. This one-way road included a 1,000 ft wooden bridge crossing the marsh. Many on the Tour promised to return to enjoy the park during better weather conditions. The park's staff helped park cars and direct us to the various buildings.

Thanks are in order to all those who made the Spring Tour possible: Janet & George Merkel, hosts; Sue & Cliff Jenkins, hosts; Anne & Tom Kenney, organizers; Buzz Diehl, photos; and Gary Wilmer, signs & beverages.



*Pictured from the left: At the Jenkins collection of vehicles and memorabilia, we saw this excellent Ford Model T delivery truck with vintage lettering that advertised Jenkins' Florist in Suitland, MD. This was the business they were in for many years; and on the right George and Janet Merkel, our hosts at the Tour starting point.*

### Brief History of the REO Motor Car Company

The classified ads on page 14 contain a 1929 REO for sale, not a car you see very often anymore. American automotive history has many unusual stories, and the history of the REO is certainly one of them.

Incorporated in Lansing, MI., the REO Motor Car Company operated from 1905 to 1975, at first making affordable cars and then later on more upscale cars, heavy duty trucks, and buses.

REO vehicles were Oldsmobiles in a different way – the company name originated from the initials of Ransom E. Olds. In 1897 Ransom Olds formed the Olds Motor Works, which was merged into GM in 1908. Around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Oldsmobile was the largest American car maker, with annual production of around

500 vehicles – today that's less than a shift at many factories. He left Olds Motor around 1900. When forming his new venture in 1905, the former Olds company threatened legal action if Olds used his name, hence the REO brand was born.

In the late 1920s and early in the Depression REO made some of the most elegant models of the time; REO Flying Cloud and REO Royale 8. They were the first to use Lockheed's new hydraulic internal expanding brake system and featured European styling. The Royale 8 helped start the automotive body streamlining trend.

REO phased out car production in 1936, but continued to make heavy-duty trucks and the REO Speed Wagon. In 1957 they merged with White Motor Company.