

THE GOAT TRUCK

The year was about 1980 and I was a park warden in Yoho National Park.

Park wardens and pick-up trucks go hand in hand. It is a tradition. A park warden pick-up is an office, a tool box, a closet, a lunch room, an armory, a tack room, a kennel – you name it!

Wardens are somewhat proud of their pick-up trucks. The trucks probably get more washing than their socks.

There was a standing joke - why do wardens have their Stetsons turned up? -- so three of them can fit in a pick-up truck. We tried to laugh at this old joke when it came from a park naturalist or a general work staff. Sure - we could laugh at ourselves but we knew that they were all jealous of our macho trucks. Some of the pick-ups were 4x4's and some had club-cabs. We honestly needed these trucks for taking bear traps up fire roads, hauling horse trailers, fire equipment and rescue gear. They were really cool to drive too.

One day I was going to the Administration office. I was due for a new truck - I had smashed up my full sized Ford pick-up a few months earlier. It was an unfortunate accident but I have to admit that I was looking forward to driving a brand new truck.

The Superintendent was standing beside a shiny new *baby* brown truck - exactly the color of a warden truck. The Superintendent of the day was trying to prove to Ottawa that he was *fiscally responsible*. He waved me over and asked me how I like my new truck. He looked proud as he invited me to look it over. He said that this was going to be the standard warden vehicle from now on. "They will save on fuel and they are much easier on the budget than the oversized pigs that you drive now".

My mouth fell open as I gazed upon a miniature little toy truck - a model of a real truck. I sputtered about how there will be no room for our gear and that they won't stand up to the rough driving that goes with our job. He glared at me and said I probably have too much gear anyway and if I drive slower I may not wreck this one. There wasn't too much I could reply to that remark.

The next day I crawled into the miniature cab of this hateful little vehicle. My Stetson hit the roof and was pushing on my ears. I finally took it off. There was just room for it on the seat beside me.

I was driving down the highway when I got a call on the radio from Alan, the warden at Lake O'Hara. The time of the year was late June and the ice was starting to break up at Lake O'Hara. Alan said that there was a dead mountain goat floating in the lake and it had drifted into the shoreline. It must have been killed by an avalanche during the winter. The stench from the bloated carcass was very unpleasant for the lodge guests and would probably attract a bear. I gathered some rope, hip waders, a wheelbarrow and a few other items that might come in useful. I threw the gear in the back of my new pet truck and struggled to get the under powered little beast up the steep fire road to lake O'Hara.

When I arrived at Lake O'Hara Alan was there to meet me. He looked quizzically at the new truck but made no comment. We took the wheelbarrow and walked down the trail. We could smell the goat long before we could see it. It was in the shallows and we held our noses and put a rope around it and maneuvered the ripe mass to the shoreline.

We tipped the wheelbarrow on its side and managed to slither the rank carcass into the barrel in one piece. It was a short but unpleasant struggle to wheel the aromatic mass back to the truck. Visitors gave us a wide berth.

With some reluctant help from campground staff we managed to lift the whole mess intact into the back of "Piss Ant"; a name that I had identified the new truck with. We used several sailor, climbing and horse packing knots to tie the writhing mass in the back of the truck.

My goal was to keep the load in place until I reached the landfill site back down in the main valley. I drove slowly and carefully down the steep and rough access road and managed to make it almost to the highway with the goat still riding the wheelbarrow. I stopped to unlock the gate and noticed that the goat was bloated even more. It was an unusually hot day for this time of year.

I was almost to the highway when I observed a boat stuck on an old beaver dam in the shallows of Wapta Lake. The pilot of the boat was madly waving at me. It was Kathy, one of the wardens. She had decided to take the rescue boat for a test run and ran aground. I gingerly pulled my delicate load over to the side of the road. It was on an angle but the wheelbarrow was still upright as I went over to help Kathy tow the boat back into deeper water. She thanked me and wrinkled her nose at the smell of my precarious load - several meters away. "Nice truck" she commented with a touch of sarcasm in her voice.

I walked up the hill and stepped cautiously inside the cab. The stench had permeated this tiny space. My weight in the truck must have been the unbalancing point of the wheelbarrow. It tipped - the goat exploded in the back of the limited space of the truck box. I drove as fast as "Piss Ant" could go to the dump. I managed to unload the foul mess fairly quickly with the help of a shovel. I left the wheelbarrow at the dump for another day.

I took the truck to the compound and hosed it out. It still had a foul odor. A jug of strong bleach helped as I flushed out the last of the maggots.

I finally got back to the office and found out that another warden, Harry, and I were to go on a mountain rescue practice at Lake Louise the next day. Later as I crammed my rescue gear into the cab of the truck I noticed that the dead goat smell still seemed to linger. I thought that it may just be on my clothes and forgot about it when I went home for the evening.

Early the next day it was cool mountain morning with the promise of another hot day. I picked up Harry and he said "What is that smell - I don't think it is a new vehicle smell". I told him about the goat and he grimaced as he tried to fold himself into the passenger seat. "What did you do to deserve this piece of shit to drive, anyway" he grumbled.

We drove to the helicopter pad at Lake Louise and our little truck was nicely hidden among the huge 4x4 rescue trucks from the Banff Park Warden Service. We walked by these magnificent trucks decked out in great roll bars, sirens, lights, winches - some were 4x4's with club cabs and they all had the best of equipment that it takes to make a respectable warden truck.

We were flown to the top of a glacier above Lake Louise and spent the day doing sling practice, self arrest techniques and a crevasse rescue practice. The day was sunny and hot and we were all looking forward to having a beer at the Post Hotel when we got back to the trucks.

The sun had been penetrating the heli-pad parking lot all day. We stepped out of the helicopter and one of the wardens sniffed the air and said "What is that smell - what died?" Everyone was looking around and couldn't spot the source of the odor. Harry and I looked sheepish when one of the wardens looked behind a giant pick-up truck and spotted little "Piss Ant" fermenting in the hot sun. The top of the cab barely came above the wheels of its neighbor. We were thirsty and endured the bantering and unflattering comments about our toy truck while we had a few mugs. My explaining about the dead goat did nothing to quell the indignities.

I did get some worried looks when I commented that the Superintendent had proclaimed that the Warden Service right across Canada were going to be issued pint sized trucks and K cars as part of a new cost saving strategy. The term "Bull Shit" came up a few times but I think that I did create a small glimmer of doubt.

There was one more pint sized truck added to our fleet in Yoho but neither truck lasted very long. A few trips up the Amiskwi and Ottertail fire roads with bear traps or fire equipment soon took their toll on the delicate frames. I left Yoho and transferred to Banff Park. I was unsure if "Piss Ant" was ever completely free of the goat odor or if perhaps other drivers had stopped to look at the tires and wonder what they had driven over.

Our *fiscally responsible* superintendent was promoted and to this day most of the warden trucks are back to being a respectable full size with all of the necessary equipment - some are 4x4s and some have club-cabs.

Don Mickle
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