

Old No. 3 will ride again

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HOBBBS NEWS-SUN

When she first arrived in Hobbs 57 years ago, she must have made heads turn as she raced up and down the city streets showing off her sleek, strong chassis and bright red coat.

But she wasn't just another pretty face, she was a 1944 Mack fire truck Type-45 and in 1944 she was top of the line.

Hobbs Fire Department No. 3 was born July 28, 1944, at Mack's Allentown, Pa. factory. Soon afterward she went to the company's Fire Body Facility at Long Island where workers transformed her from a mere truck into a fire truck, certainly the most glorious kind of truck around.

The company shipped her to Hobbs on Dec. 21, 1944.

In an old black and white photo, taken at Mack's Fire Body Facility, the sleek, brand new red truck has "Hobbs Fire Department" painted boldly on the hood, and "HFD No. 3" along the side.

Today a city logo obscures the spot where "No. 3" was once painted.

HFD No. 3 gave decades of service to the people of Hobbs and its Fire Department. John Watson, the Hobbs Fire Department paramedic who has



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John Watson (right) and Steve Studley examine HFD No. 3. Watson is leading an effort to restore the old fire truck.

decided to try to restore Old No. 3, says she didn't leave the fire service until 1976, giving an impressive 32 years of service fighting fires and saving lives.

Watson says most fire departments consider squeezing 20 years out of a truck an accomplishment.

Generations of Hobbs firemen joined the Fire Department and retired while Old No. 3 kept on trucking through 32 long years of service.

When Old No. 3 joined the Hobbs Fire Department, World War II raged across Europe and the Pacific. Franklin D. Roosevelt was president and TV

was just a glimmer in the eye of some crafty inventor. She served through seven presidents, three wars and countless Hobbs area fires and emergencies.

Most firemen, Watson says, are almost compulsive about how

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service.

"I wouldn't want to do anything else," Watson said. "Life is like this: You can make a lot of money, or you can do what you like."

While Old No. 3 may join another vintage Hobbs fire truck, a 1930s era Seagraves in a local museum, Watson hopes the truck can make appearances in parades and make tours of area hotrod shows.

Watson says keeping a few of the old trucks around and running helps the public understand the fire service, because for most people those trucks are the fire service.

"These trucks symbolize what the fire department stands for," Watson said. "When people think of the fire department, they think of a fire truck."

Old No. 3 currently makes her

home under a shade tree behind Fire Station Number 3 in Hobbs, and considering her age, she doesn't look bad.

The paint has faded and the engine no longer cranks — the old truck requires a hand crank to get started — but no horrible rust spots have appeared and she looks much like she does in old photos from the factory.

The only change the Fire Department made was adding an extra rack to the top to carry a longer ladder.

Watson credits Old No. 3's condition to the care she received when the city put her in storage at the city garage.

Steve Studley, who works at the city garage, says HFD No. 3 was there when he started working in 1987. He says he wanted to buy the old truck, but was told he would have to bid on it at auc-

tion. The city, however, never did auction Old No. 3.

"At least they kept it," Watson said. "I'm sure glad they didn't auction it off."

Studley visited Old No. 3 not long ago and seemed interested in the project. He suggested a few places Watson might find parts, and located the crank for the old girl's engine.

Watson says the project to restore her to her glory will be like that, not just his project but a department-wide effort.

"This isn't just going to be my project," Watson said. "It's going to be everybody's project ... I'm just kind of leading up the project."

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