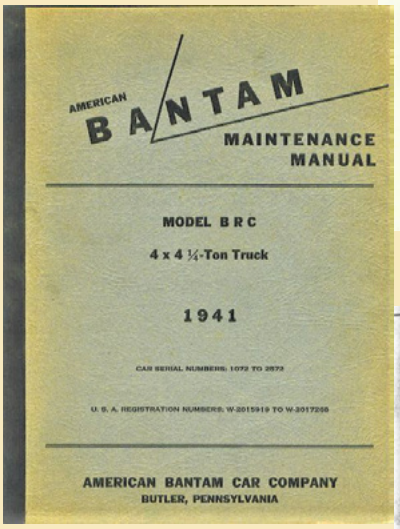
1941 BRCs: Production Began 80 Years Ago This Month

by George Hollins

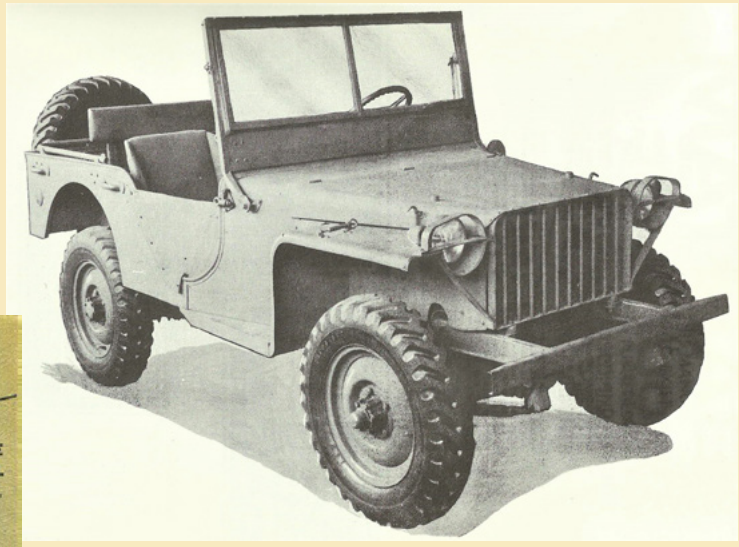
It has only been a few months since we celebrated the 80th anniversary of the 1940 BRC Pilot and 1940 BRC production of 70 vehicles. I hope you saved your candles because we have another Bantam milestone to acknowledge. The 1941 BRC started production 80 years ago, in March, 1941.



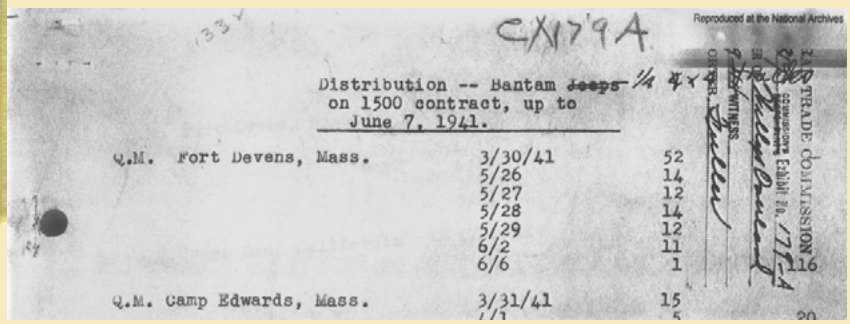
Three companies, Bantam, Ford, and Willys, were each awarded contracts for 1,500 vehicles to be built in the first half of 1941. The Bantam BRC Series-1 began production in March 1941 and finished in June 1941. The Ford GP Series-1 production began in Feb 1941 and finished in June 1941.The Willys MA Series-1 production began in May 1941 and finished in July 1941.

Bantam completed 1,488 BRC Series-1 by the end of June 1941. The remaining 12 were built in Oct 1941 during Series-2 BRC production.

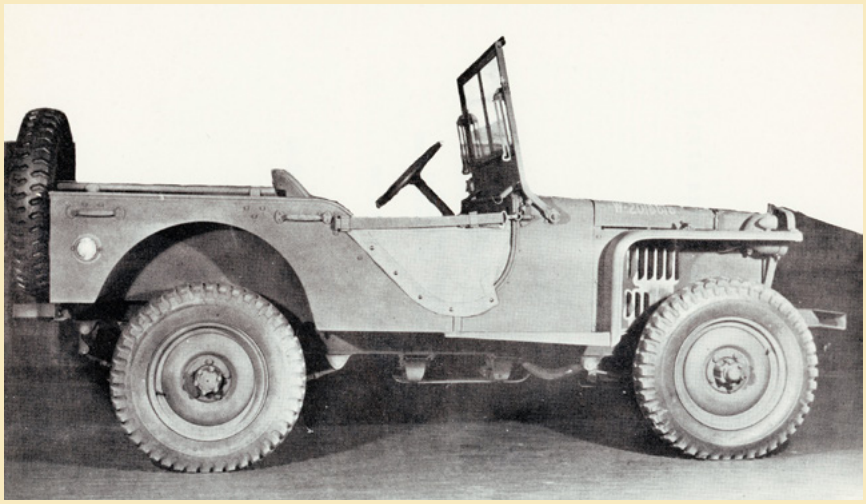
Bantam, Ford, and Willys were awarded additional contracts later in 1941 and each built Series-2 vehicles between September through November 1941.



1941 BRC Series-1 from the 1941 BRC Series-1 maintenance manual TM10-1205.



An excerpt from Federal Trade Commission documents shows the first 1941 BRC Series-1 shipment 3/30/41 of 52 cars to Fort Devens, Mass. (see cover photo of the young men unloading one of the first BRC). Another shipment 3/31/41 of 15 cars shipped to Camp Edwards, Mass.



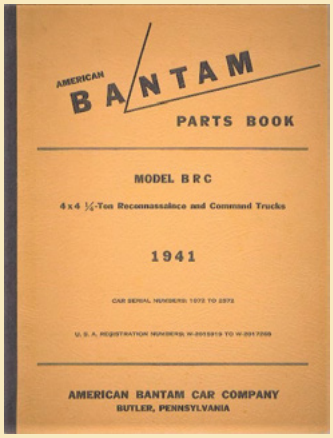
1941 BRC Series-1 registration W-2016616 from the 1941 BRC Series-1 parts book TM10-1204. Note the change to the side curtain design compared to the photo above from the maintenance manual. The Firestone tires changed from the early ground grip type to the bent bar design. The registration number W-2016616 dates this BRC as April 1941 production, based on known surviving BRC original numbers.

In this article, I will discuss several of the design changes made during Series-1 BRC production March-June 1941.

Left, is the earliest known photo of the 1941 BRC Series-1 from the BRC maintenance manual TM10-1205.

The BRC in this photo is presumed to be the first or one of the first 1941 BRC Series-1 built for Government inspection to begin production in March 1941. Note the early grill and early side curtains. The Firestone ground grip tires were probably left over from the 1940 BRC production.

In the photo, only the two rubber pads are visible on the hood for resting the windshield in the down position. The hood is missing the third rubber pad for when the hood is raised and rested against the windshield. We know the third pad was added when production started based on original photos. Possibly the third pad was a design oversight and added during inspection of the first vehicles.



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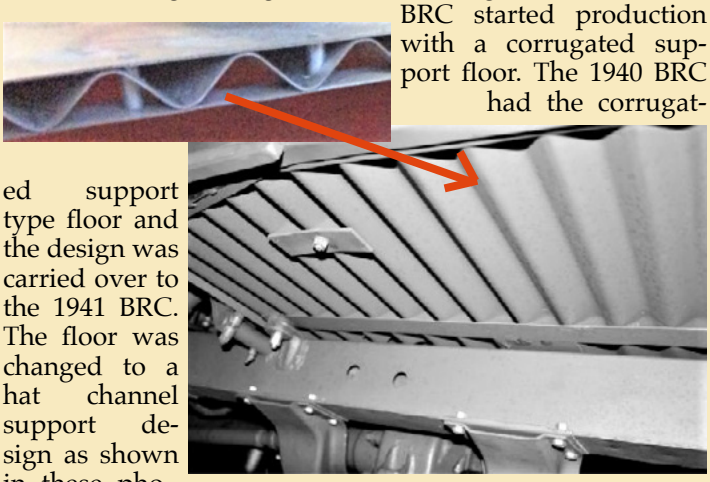
Bantam made several design changes during BRC Series-1 production from March through June 1941. The most notable changes were the floor, front grill, oil pan, flywheel housing cover, gear shift lever, and canvas side curtains.

The floor design change was the most significant. The 1941 BRC started production with a corrugated support floor. The 1940 BRC had the corrugated support type floor and the design was carried over to the 1941 BRC. The floor was changed to a hat channel support design as shown in these photos.



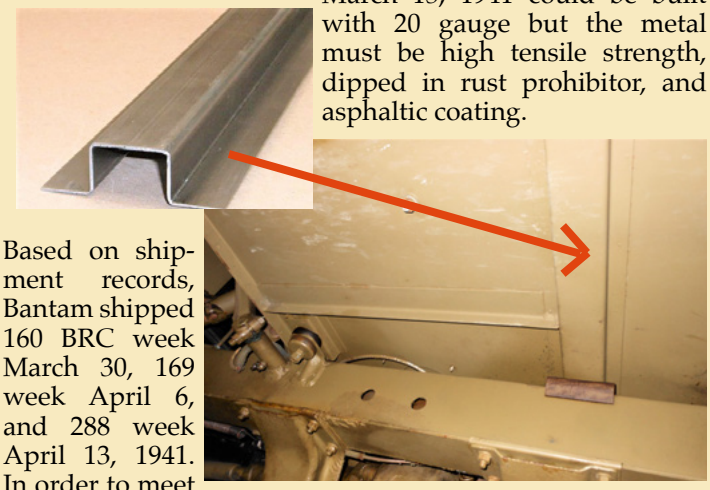
1941 BRC Series-1 corrugated support floor

There has been much debate by BRC owners regarding how many of the 1941 Series-1 BRC had the corrugated floor and the effective serial number when the BRC changed to the hat channel floor. Based on surviving BRC, the consensus debated on the G503 forum is approximately the first 400 of the 1941 BRC had the corrugated floor.

So why did Bantam make this floor design change and how did Bantam get the Government to allow such a major change? The answer might begin with a Bantam production mistake. In early March 1941 the first 1941 BRC were built and ready for Army inspection to begin further production. The Army inspector discovered that the corrugated support floor metal was too thin, 28 gauge, instead of the contract requirement for the heavier 18 gauge.

Based on the discovery by the Army inspector, a letter was sent to Bantam dated 15March1941 by Lt. Colonel J. Van Ness Ingram, Purchasing and Contracting Officer, Holabird Maryland, advising that the 28 gauge floors were unacceptable. Ingram agreed to accept all the floors built before March 15 with the condition that Bantam would be responsible to replace any floors that should fail.

The letter further advised that all floors fabricated after March 15, 1941 could be built with 20 gauge but the metal must be high tensile strength, dipped in rust prohibitor, and asphaltic coating.



1941 BRC Series-1 hat channel support floor

Based on shipment records, Bantam shipped 160 BRC week March 30, 169 week April 6, and 288 week April 13, 1941. In order to meet this schedule, Bantam must have had at least 400 corrugated floors in various stages of assembly on March 15 1941 which correlates with the estimated number of corrugated floors based on surviving BRC. It is my speculation that Bantam made the decision immediately after receiving the March 15 letter, to use up the 400 corrugated floors and then to change to the less complicated hat channel design rather than correct the corrugated floors as stipulated in the Army Quartermaster letter. It is my speculation that Bantam was aware that Ford and Willys were using the hat channel support floor design. Further, it is my speculation that it would have been easy for Bantam to negotiate with the Army to allow the change to the hat channel support floor based on the successful testing already completed by Ford and Willys.

1941 BRC Series-1 registration W-2016033. The 1941 War Department registration numbers assigned to Bantam started with W-2015919. Therefore, the 1941 BRC in this photo, W-2016033 is the 114th vehicle registered and one of the earliest known photographed in use by the Army. This early BRC is presumed to have the corrugated floor.

1941 BRC Series-1 registration W-2016369. The BRC in this photo is the 450th vehicle registered. Therefore, it is one of the first BRC photographed that is presumed to have the hat channel floor.

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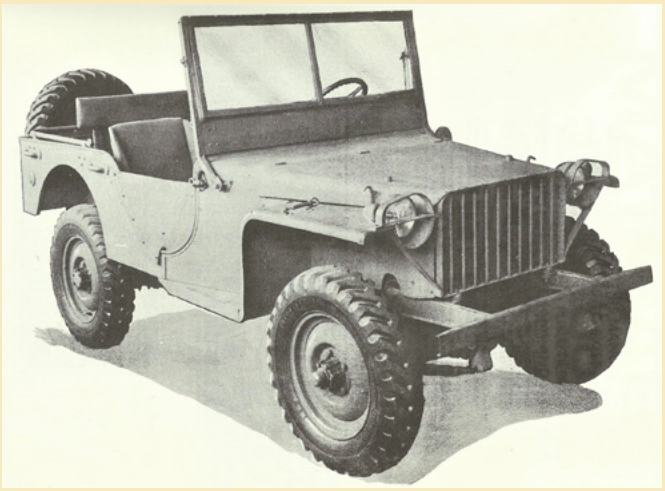
Another very visible design change during the 1941 BRC Series-1 production was the front grill. The grill had four known designs based on original photographs and surviving cars. The grill design changes were made to the fender support.

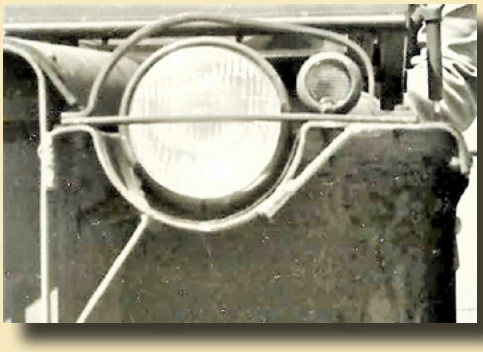


BRC GRILL #1

Grill #1 is visible in the photo in the maintenance manual (see first page of this article). The fender support is a simple single brace. There are no other original photos known to exist with this grill. Therefore, this grill could have been only on the first 1941 BRC or a very few of the first BRCs. There is one surviving BRC known to exist with this grill.

BRC GRILL #2

Grill #2 is visible in the photo with the WPA boys unloading one of the first BRCs to Fort Devens. The fender support brace is a single piece of metal that wraps around the underside of the headlight bucket. Only two BRC have survived with this grill, BRC1094 and BRC1113, both DOD 3-41, and both shipped during the first week of production March 30 – April 5, 1941. Bantam shipped 160 cars that first week of March 30 of which we believe only the first 100-136 cars were built with this grill #2.



BRC GRILL #3

Grill #3 is visible in the photo with Senator Claude Pepper and Bantam lobbyist Charles Payne on the US Capitol steps. The fender support is two separate pieces welded to the headlight bucket. This grill was presumably installed during the first week of production March 30 – April 5, 1941.

BRC GRILL #4

Grill #4 became the standard grill and is visible in many original BRC photographs. The fender support is one single piece welded to the headlight bucket. The second support piece that extended out under the fender has been eliminated. The first known survivor with this grill is BRC1208, DOD 4-41, the 136th car built during the first week of production March 30 – April 5, 1941. This grill continued in production for all BRC through the end of 1941.

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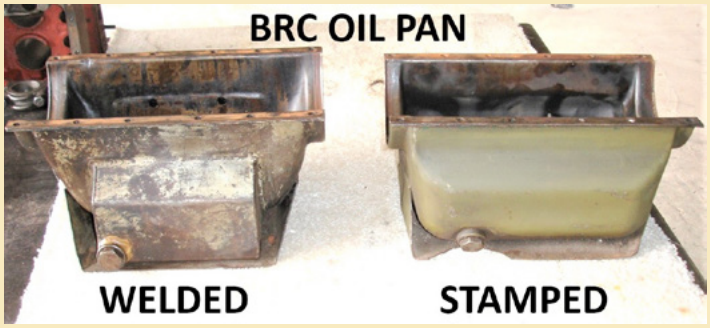
Two GIs giving a workout to a 1941 BRC Series-1 . Note the WWI helmets (refer to my helmet article in RT-258).

Another 1941 BRC Series-1 design change was made to the engine oil pan. The War Department specification for the 1/4-ton truck required the vehicle to drive up a 45-degree angle. The Continental engine was primarily used in lift trucks and other industrial applications and was not capable of meeting the 45-degree spec. Therefore, starting with the 1940 Pilot and 1940 BRC, Continental Motors modified the engine oil pan from a 4-quart to 5-quart capacity to meet this requirement. The oil pan was modified with welded extensions on the sides for the additional oil. Continental, probably anticipating or hoping for thousands of future engine sales to Bantam, retooled the oil pan to a stamped design. The oil pan was stamped into two half shells and seamed together in the middle. The first surviving 1941 BRC known with the stamped oil pan is BRC1838, car #766, built in late April 1941. Therefore, it is believed the change to the stamped oil pan occurred about half way through the Series-1 contract for 1,500 cars.

Cast aluminum flywheel housing cover March-May 1941



Left, welded oil pan March-April 1941. Right, stamped oil pan April-Nov 1941. Photo courtesy of Duncan & Kim Rolls.

Another design change made by Continental Motors was the flywheel housing bottom cover. On the early 1941 BRC Series-1, the cover was cast aluminum. Continental retooled and changed the cover to stamped steel. It is believed the change was made in May 1941, based on surviving BRC.

Stamped steel flywheel housing cover May-Nov 1941

Curved gear shift lever March-April 1941

Straight gear shift lever April-Nov 1941

Another change was made to the gear shift lever from Warner Transmission. Several photos have been found to confirm that the early March and possibly early April 1941 BRC had the curved gear shift lever design carried over from the 1940 BRCs and Bantam cars. The lever was changed to a straight design in April 1941 based on original photos and surviving BRC.

Another 1941 BRC design change was made to the canvas side curtains. The split in the curtain was moved forward as shown in the desert BRC photo on the left. This change occured in April production based on original photographs.

In conclusion, when I started my jeep hobby back in the 1960s, there were only a few BRC known to exist. The first BRC I ever saw in person was BRC1911 in the Harrah museum in the 1970s. Now there are approximately 100 that are known to have survived (see BRC list at http://BRC1940.com.

As we research and find more survivors, some of the above information may change. But for now, I hope this article was useful.

One of the 150 BRC Series-1 shipped to the British in April 1941 on the lend lease program on duty in North Africa. Note the design change to the side curtains.

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