

BELOW: During my first visits to the mills south of Colon in the 1990s, No. 1413 was on the Jesus Rabi scrap line, with an uncertain future. I was introduced to Jose Hernandez Rodriguez, whose 1929 Model A Ford was in equally derelict condition – on blocks, lacking wheels, tires, and motor. So desperate was the economic situation that 2005 saw not only 1891 No. 1413 back at work, but also Jose's Model A.

When Jose and I rolled into the mill plaza we found not one, but both locomotives in steam. With the inspector back in Havana, the crews had decided to celebrate in style. The master mechanic even gave No. 1413 another coating of his chalk mixture, this time covering the whole boiler front, including the stack.



ABOVE: When I arrived at Central Rene Fraga on this occasion in 2003, Vulcan Mogul No. 1518 was switching the mill yard while 100-year-old No. 1413 sat on the shop track in steam. It didn't take long to round up enough men to crew both engines for my photo, the master mechanic working as second engineer. He had been kind enough earlier that morning to "put on the old girl's make-up," as he said, using his bare hands to apply a white paste of crushed local chalk and water to brighten the smokebox front.

I travelled to the mill that afternoon from nearby Colon in a bright blue 1937 Chevy belonging to Raul Fernandez Garcia. He was calling out for passengers to the port of Matanzas, though his car was still empty. He'd been an old-car buyer for years, he told me, restoring and driving them to provide his family with a subsistence-level income.

Raul had a 1940s Chevy before this one, which he fixed up and sold for a good price. After a few more repairs he was planning to sell this one, too. He was quite proud of having located and installed a brand-new Perkins diesel motor in it, along with the related running gear. Once completed, he expected to get around 120,000 pesos for it, or 5,500 U.S. dollars at the time.

Matanzas is much further from Colon than the Rene Fraga mill. Raul said that a full load of eight passengers would be paying eight dollars for the trip, so I offered him \$10, which we both thought was a good deal.