

## BAYAMO

This colonial city of 130,000 lies in the lee of the Sierra Maestre, Cuba's most formidable mountain range. In the 1990s, fancy carriage taxis provided local service from tree-lined Railroad Park, across the street from the city's classic stone station, while nearby a fleet of old American cars waited for longer hauls. That's where I met Nelson Mojena Flores, when I stopped to admire the body work and original parts on his red Model A Ford. He ended up driving me back to my hotel, where we arranged a photo session for the next day.

One of the carriage drivers told me that caring for horses is each driver's full-time commitment, with much off time needed just to locate scarce feed. When I mentioned this to Nelson, he tapped the dashboard of his car and said: "This is also a full-time commitment. I also have to feed it and take care of it. In fact, it's my whole life!" The money that taxi drivers earned barely provided food and clothing for their families, though finding these things was made easier through the contacts they made in their daily travels.

"When I'm not driving, I usually have to do repair work on this car," Nelson lamented. "I'm always looking for parts, trying to find gasoline. It takes every day, so as not to get behind." He and I had a good morning trip to the nearby sugar mill of Central Arquimedes Colina. Not until afterward did Nelson show me a bit of his unusual and creative workmanship. To hold the innertube in one of the back tires, he'd used thin wire to stitch a piece of canvas over a 1-1/2" hole!

"A new tire for this car would cost at least \$75 US," he shrugged. "I don't know if I will ever get that far ahead." My "gift" for the day's outing took care of that.



**ABOVE AND TOP:** Bayamo taxis. Nelson Mojena's 1929 Model A seems like a relative newcomer in this lineup on the street in front of Bayamo's railway station. Although the Ford was over 70 years old, it was young compared to these colonial facades near downtown Bayamo.