

(American Junk)
Get it out of my bloodstream
(American Junk)
Get it out of my system
(American Junk)
I can only take so much
(American Junk)
Gotta get back to who I am.

- *Apo Hiking Society, 1985*¹

Re-inventing the Jeepney

An essay on the imperative enhancement of the Public Utility Jeepney

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Jeepney Experiences

The jeep is an American junk, as the song suggests, since it was left to us Filipinos by the Americans after World War II. It transformed into a passenger type sixty years later and the American junk is still with us and has not changed that much since then. I believe it is time to re-invent the jeepney, get it out of our system and the Filipino psyche as an old wasteful piece of American junk and turn it into something in tune with the needs of the times, a truly Filipino icon.

I vividly remember one of my favorite toys that were given to me by my father when I was a boy was a Tonka² toy Jeep. It was blue, about 12-inch long and had all the features of what an off-road vehicle should be. That toy was so tough that I used to ride it and pull it with a heavy load on it. It is now in our attic and I would love to look for it and hopefully find it sometime in the future. Never did I know that I would start doing an in-depth research about the jeep as part of my studies for my masters program.

¹ Lyrics of the song *American Junk* by the Apo Hiking Society. 1985.

² Tonka toys were one of the toughest toys in the 1960's; now owned by Hasbro, the originators of Mr. Potato Head toy. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tonka> ; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasbro>. Accessed 10/13/2011.

I also recall reading a short essay written by Gen. Carlos P. Romulo when I was in elementary school. The essay described the jeepney in a poetic manner likening it to a hotel lobby where guests come face-to-face with each other exchanging subtle glances or chatting with one another.³

It was in fifth grade when my mother prodded me to ride the jeepney to go to school and come back home unaccompanied. Martial law was just been declared and perhaps my mother felt it was safe to let me ride the jeepney. It was around this time too when I witnessed a pick-pocket slashing a passenger's pants with a blade; he was part of a *laslas* gang. His victim was an old man who was sleeping inside the jeepney who woke up later and found out that his pocket had a slit and his coin purse gone. It all happened in front of me. I was 10 years old.

I could go on and on to recount all my experiences concerning the jeepney; from changing clothes while commuting, to performing a balancing act by hanging on the back entrance railings just to be in school on time; from falling in love with a girl while riding the jeepney at the height of the noontime sun, to witnessing an attempted robbery hold up late at night.

I even delivered a speech, almost an ode, about how to ride a jeepney in one of my classes in California State University in Hayward when I was a foreign student there. All my American classmates were amazed on how we commute in Manila. The jeepney was my travel companion early in my life. Without it, I would have never learned more about Philippine life. The jeepney is part of us, our culture and our identity. We must do something to make it better. We must all work together to re-invent the jeepney.

Rationale of this paper

Having been brought up and being part of the jeepney culture since my youth, I have observed that there has not been a significant improvement with the jeepney as one of the major transportation means of the ordinary Filipino. I feel that the Filipino of the 21st century in this global age deserves a better way of commuting from one place to another.

The jeepney has not evolved remarkably since its "invention" after World War II, although it has been romanticized by writers and artists alike, referring to it as

³ Essay of Gen. Carlos P. Romulo still being located by the author. Request has been written to the Carlos P. Romulo Foundation. The foundation responded and is now in the process of locating the essay.

the “king of the road”⁴ or a canvass for expressing Filipino visual folk art⁵ or depicting it as an ingenious invention or an engineering marvel.⁶ I believe that it is about time to do something about it as the disadvantages, if we continue to allow it to traverse our roads, far outweighs the advantages. Yes, the jeepney is truly a Filipino icon, a product of filling up a need, where opportunity meets the demand, however it is about time we radically change the power-horse into an efficient, clean, modern, orderly, sustainable, safe and economical means of transportation.

I have observed the apparent need for its reinvention since we cannot in our subliminal consciousness let go of the idea of phasing out this outdated mode of transport similar to the giving up of the human-powered rickshaws of Hong Kong which is now merely a photo ops accessory in certain tourist areas of the former British colony. Surely, Filipinos would find it hard to believe for that to happen, the jeepney being just props for tourists and will be just part of our history similar to that of the *tranvias* of the pre-war era. The jeepney, I believe should remain operational but must have a major make-over to be able to meet the needs of the Filipino commuter.

Limitations, Scope and Assumptions

This paper is a discussion about the re-invention or the improvement of the public utility jeepney (PUJ). It is more of a commentary essay and a discussion of concepts about the jeepney and not a full-blown research about the topic. It attempts to describe the PUJ’s present stature, several issues and concerns are presented such on safety, design, the national government’s plan and then aims to formulate plausible answers to the issues raised.

This paper also presents the origin and definition of the Filipino word jeepney. It gives a brief history of the public utility vehicle and some insights from key players in the jeepney transport industry.

⁴ Pacita U. Juan, *Jeep Ni Juan*, (Anvil Publishing, Inc., 2011), 52.

⁵ Toym Imao, <http://www.ejeepney.org/sites/default/files/eJeep%20artist%20statement.pdf> (accessed 13 Oct 2011).

⁶ Anthony Braganza, et. al., “Comparison of Local Jeepney Specifications and Selected Philippine National Standards for Road Vehicles.” (undergraduate research, University of the Philippines Diliman, 2007).

The assumption is that the PUJ's are obsolete, unsafe and it needs to be improved. It will also tackle current initiatives to effect some change and the possible or apparent hindrance to these improvements.

Jeep, Jitney, Jeepney

The word jeep is a universally accepted term referring originally to the U.S. military all-around vehicle used to transport men, machines and supplies during the Second World War.⁷ Its origins are quite ambiguous and may have originated from the Popeye cartoon character Eugene the Jeep because of the chirping sound it made.⁸ Mr. Irving Haussmann, a test driver of the Willys-Overland product development team, was believed to be the one responsible making the word popular when he heard military personnel referring to the vehicle as "jeep" when he brought it to one of the military camps.⁹ Jeep could have meant as an inexperienced person or a new military recruit as used in the late 1930's to early 1940's as an American slang.¹⁰ The most plausible origin of the word was from the initials G.P. (jee pee) which means "General Purpose" or "Government Purpose", hence when condensed it became "jeep."¹¹ At present, Jeep is a well-know brand of sports utility vehicle. The brand was initially owned by AMC (American Motors Corporation) and now by Chrysler as the latter acquired the former.¹²

Jitney, meanwhile, is also an old American slang which means a five-cent coin and later meant a term referring to a mini bus which traverses a regular path which picks up and drops passengers along that route, charging passengers five cents, hence the combined meaning in a single word.¹³

The word *jeepney* therefore, perhaps morphed from the words jeep and jitney;¹⁴ and now is being only used here in the Philippines; hence it is a Filipino word.

⁷ Wordorigins.org. <http://www.wordorigins.org/index.php/more/372/> (retrieved 10/13/11).

⁸ Wordorigins.org. <http://www.wordorigins.org/index.php/more/372/> (accessed 10/13/11).

⁹ Jeep ni Juan. p.20.

¹⁰ Wordorigins.org <http://www.wordorigins.org/index.php/more/372/> retrieved 10/13/11.

¹¹ Jeep ni Juan. p. 20

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeep#Origin_of_the_name

¹³ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/jitney>

¹⁴ Definition from Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeep#Origin_of_the_name and Jeep ni Juan. p.20

Jeepney refers to an all-around passenger utility vehicle used for both public and private to transport people and products.¹⁵

History of the Jeepney

The military jeeps were developed in the late 1930's notably by two American automobile companies, namely the Ford Motor Company and Willys-Overland Motors. By the end of World War II, Willys produced a total of 363,000 units of military jeeps while Ford manufactured 230,000 units.¹⁶

Right after the Second World War, the American military forces left thousands of jeeps that were used to move soldiers and materials across the battle field. Manila was totally devastated during the liberation of the city and its major transport and communication systems were completely destroyed by the advancing American forces. The *travias* or electric train cars, owned and operated by the Manila Electric Railway and Light Company (Meralco), the major means of transportation were wiped out.

With this void left by the war in the transportation sector, Filipino entrepreneurs were quick in grabbing the opportunity and started rebuilding the jeeps which the Americans had left behind. Some were sold while some were given to the Filipinos who took down some of the parts, assembled the seats, placed a roof for shade and made the entrance at the back similar to the *tartanillas*.¹⁷

The opportunity that junked military jeeps were readily available was met by the requirement for a cheap means of transportation for the war ravaged city. This is a classic case of supply and demand and entrepreneurial skills fused together. From then on, garages were turned into small manufacturing-conversion shops within the city and nearby provinces and the jeepney was born in the mid to late 1940's. ¹⁸ Manilans had a new found means of getting around the city.

Based from the book, *Jeep ni Juan*, it was mentioned that it was in the 1970's when a group of Filipino inventors gave recognition to a musician turned entrepreneur, Clodualdo Delfino, as the originator of the jeepney. Delfino was interviewed and he said that musicians at that time needed transportation to

¹⁵ Author's definition of the word jeepney.

¹⁶ *Jeep ni Juan*. p 68

¹⁷ *Jeep ni Juan*. p. 52

¹⁸ *Jeep ni Juan* p. 53

move around. Hence, as the saying goes, necessity is the mother of all invention.¹⁹

Observations, Issues, other Information and Developments

As we can glean from the previous discussion, the jeepney is a product of gradual evolution. From a four-seater vehicle at the rear in the 1940's it has transformed into six and eight-seater in the 1950's by expanding its chassis. By the 1970's we had the 14 to 18-seater capacity. Not much has changed today except for some current developments in the industry.

The jeepney manufacturing industry has been a backyard industry. Based on a conversation with Mr. Ed Sarao, operations manager of Sarao Motors, Inc., he said that the industry has no particular dominant player. His father, the founder of the most famous name in Filipino jeepney bearing their family name, Sarao, started their family business with backyard operations in the 1950's and most of the Filipino processors still do up to now especially in the provinces.

Likewise, based from an interview with Mr. Orlando Marquez, Jr., a member of the *Liga ng Transportasyon at Operators sa Pilipinas* (LTOP), and son of the inventor of the Jumbo Jeepney, Engr. Orlando Marquez, Sr., the industry is punctuated with players from different parts of the Philippines, which means there is a major player in every province like Malaguena in Cavite, FG in Batangas, David Motors and Patrick in Bulacan, and LGS in Rizal province.

According to Mr. Rommel Juan, vice-president of MD Juan Enterprises, Inc., a leading manufacturer of vintage jeep parts which are exported in different parts of the globe, he considers David Motors Inc, one of the leading manufacturers of jeepneys. In the book, *Jeep ni Juan*, the other major players and pioneers in the jeepney industry were mentioned namely, Magsikap Legaspi, Leonardo Sarao and Anastacio Francisco.²⁰

It is also observed that the jeepney engine, from an original Willys or Ford, it is now fitted with a surplus reconditioned engine from Japan --- another junk, this time from the land of the rising sun. Hence, air pollution, as a result of the old engines' emission, becomes an environmental issue.

¹⁹ Jeep ni Juan p 53

²⁰ Jeep ni Juan p.55

According to the Philippine Development Plan 2010-2016, in its strategy on transportation, "The government will continue to promote an environmentally sustainable and people-oriented transport system. The shift from the use of fossil fuel to renewable energy sources to power vehicles shall be pursued."²¹ We hope this will become a reality.

Furthermore, the design of the jeepney or its basic form has not changed much since it became the passenger type. The hood is still the same; the spare tire on the driver's side; the passenger's entrance at the back; the seats at the back are long benches on both sides. The windows are open, fitted with rolled-up plastic covers which the passengers unroll when it begins to rain. The ceiling is low so one has to bend or stoop in order to get on and get-off the jeepney. Clearly, there are safety and design concerns that need to be addressed for the re-invention of the jeep.

Several studies were reviewed from the UP National Center for Transportation Studies which have to do with the safety, ergonomics, comfort and sturdiness of the jeepney as well as its inspection. Two studies done by Colos and Bacero are about the standardization of the assembly of the jeepneys. Another, written by Braganza, deals with the safety, ergonomic designs as well as its standardization in the manufacture of the jeepney. And still another research completed by DelaTorre about the inspection of PUJ's in UP Diliman, using Land Transportation Office safety standards, it showed that "of the 83 PUJs inspected in this study, only 3 jeepneys may be labeled roadworthy and fit for operation in the UP Diliman campus."²² We can just infer if this study was done on a national scale. We wonder how many would pass.

On its operational level, the jeepney driver collects the payment from the passengers by extending his arms at the back. Then he mentally calculates how much change he will give back to the passenger after asking where that passenger got in and where he will alight. We notice how he holds the steering wheels while in between his fingers are the Peso bills from his earnings. In between his other fingers is a stick of lighted cigarettes. The jeepney driver may stop at any point along the route to take and bring down passengers. He travels maybe an average of 7-10 kilometers per one way of his route and works a total of 12 hours.²³ He has to wait in a long queue for his turn to take passengers in a

²¹ Philippine Development Plan 2010-2016. Chapter 5. p. 132

²² Erickson L. Salaguit and Jay R. Dela Torre. "Determination of Road Worthiness of In-use Public Utility Jeepneys (PUJs) in UP Diliman." (undergraduate research, University of the Philippines Diliman) p.5

²³ Josephine M. Bayan. "Cost Characteristics of Bus and Jeepney Transport Systems in Metro Manila." (thesis, University of the Philippines Diliman)

terminal. He has to deal with the barker, the traffic enforcer and the gasoline attendant among others. The driver has to check the condition of his vehicle before and after his trip. From his gross earning he has to remit a fixed amount to the jeepney operator called the “boundary” and then what is left is his take home earnings. A BBC documentary showed a London bus driver attempting to live like a Filipino jeepney driver and it surely was tough for the Englishman.²⁴

Just how many PUJ’s are there in the Philippines? Statistics gathered from the Land Transportation Franchising Board show that as of March 2011, 59 percent or 230,000 units of the country’s public utility vehicles are PUJ’s. Taxis comprise 10% or 40,000 units; Truck-for-hire, 9 percent or 34,600 units, PUB’s, 7 percent or 28,400 units and Filcabs (Multicabs) at 5 percent or 19,800 units. ²⁵

For additional information, the following are the categories of the Public Utility Vehicles in the Philippines: PUB’s, Taxi, Garage, UV, PUJ, Filcab, Minibus, Rent-a-Car, Tourist Bus, Tourist Transport Service, School Transport, Vehicle-for-hire, Tourist Car, Truck-for-Hire and Shuttle Transport.²⁶

In Metro Manila, a later data was gathered from the study done by Bacero. It shows that in 2007 as per LTO figures, there were 54,868 units of Jeepneys in Metro Manila, of those, 48,832 units are registered with the LTFRB as PUJ’s.²⁷

What are the latest developments in the industry?

I first notice a significant change in the jeepney’s design when the Ford Fieras and the Toyota Tamaraws or Asian Utility Vehicles (AUV) and the Sport Utility Vehicles (SUV) started coming out of the market. The proliferation of surplus or CKD parts imported from Japan strengthened the backyard industry specially in the Visayas and Mindanao region where the design of the jeepneys there use these body parts instead of the jeepney form of the hood.

Another phenomenon was when the air-conditioned Mega Taxis or FX’s (named after the model of the Toyota AUV) were launched by the LTFRB. These were supposed to be metered taxi cabs which were to operate as such. But again, because of the market forces at work, the Mega Taxi driver found out he would

²⁴ BBC Documentary. Toughest place to be a bus driver. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00z08wd>. (accessed 13 Oct 2011).

²⁵ Data from Mr. Roderick Mendoza, Chief of Staff, Office of the Executive Director, LTFRB. Sept. 2011.

²⁶ Data from Mr. Roderick Mendoza, Chief of Staff, Office of the Executive Director, LTFRB. Sept. 2011.

²⁷ Riches A. Bacero. “Assessment of Jeepney’s Components, Systems and Separate Technical Unit for the Development of Technical Standards,” (graduate research, University of the Philippines Diliman).

be earning more if he would traverse a certain self-designated route and charge each passenger a particular amount. Hence, the Mega Taxi becomes a shared taxi instead, operating like a PUJ. The market quickly adapted to it since there maybe a niche that has not been served, those who wanted a cleaner and cooler ride. The commuters were willing to pay a higher fare than the ordinary jeepney where the temperature is hotter and the passenger will be inhaling polluted air. If you are a white collar worker, taking the FX would mean you will arrive in the office fresh and tidy.

The operation was deemed illegal and was a violation of the franchise agreement. But they proliferated which means there was a market segment that was being served. I think government has failed to act on this phenomenon effectively up to now since it has not come up with a strategy that could have been a catalyst in re-inventing the jeepney. According to Mr. Roderick Mendoza, chief-of-staff of the Office of the Executive Director of the LTFRB, the UV express (similar to the jeep or the FX where there is a fixed route) and GT express (which means Garage to Terminal wherein the UV travels from its point of origin to its destination without any stops).

Another development in the story of the jeepney is the emergence of the Jumbo Jeepneys which were invented by Engr. Orlando Marquez Sr. In an interview with his son, Orlando Jr., there were around 200 units that were made and sold between 2004- present. About 60 percent of these jumbo jeepneys are PUJ's while 40 percent are used for tourist and shuttle service. The cost of one unit is 1.150 million pesos for a reconditioned engine while a new Isuzu engine would cost 1.7 million pesos and they are willing to assist the buyer get a government franchise for a line.

The jumbo jeepneys are larger than the ordinary jeepneys with a capacity of 25-30 passengers. Its entrance is at the front right side of the vehicle with an emergency exit at the back. It is almost a mini-bus but the front hood is formed like a jeepney. Its engine is diesel powered. The seats are positioned facing the front by rows unlike the parallel seating configuration of the original jeepney.

Mr. Marquez identifies that lack of financial capital as one of the challenge they have to tackle in order to make it happen in their industry. They are also hoping government could give them financial assistance to grow their venture. He also mentioned another challenge which confronts them is corruption in government specifically in the LTFRB and the DOTC.

Another innovation is the development of the e-jeepney. The originator of this is MD Juan Enterprises, Inc. This cleaner alternative cost around 700 to 800

thousand Pesos. The battery power can last for 12 hours. A couple of units are parked in front of the UP NCTS for the UP community. Apparently, according to Mr. Rommel Juan, UP is still waiting for its budget to buy the units. Several units are now plying the streets of Makati CBD. The structure is very light as the battery powered engine can not pull a heavy load. Hence, the design takes the form of a lighter vehicle than the ordinary jeepney.

Asked how the industry and its stakeholder will accept major changes in the jeepney, according to Mr. Sarao their company is willing to develop new forms of the jeepney which are safe, comfortable, could be standardized and ergonomically acceptable for the riding public. But the primary consideration lies in the price of the units. The market is price sensitive and Mr. Sarao's company has to work on that premise. Mr. Sarao also emphasized that they have to work with materials that are readily available in the market.

Mr. Marquez, being a member of a transport group has signified that drivers and operators are agreeable to such make-over for the Philippine jeepney in fact they have started promoting that since the time of President Fidel V. Ramos.

Mr. Mendoza of the LTFRB, on the other hand, thinks that any major change in the jeepney will garner complaints, criticisms and resistance from the transport sector and this action would most likely be labeled as anti-poor.

Conclusion and Recommendations

With all the foregoing, I think that based on the current trends happening in the transportation sector, the Philippine jeepney is ripe enough to have a major make-over, a re-invention. First, there is a market segment that will cater to a modern, safer, clean and environmental friendly public utility vehicle.

Second, because of the growing population of Metro Manila and its periphery and the high price of fuel, a cheaper alternative mode of public transport should be developed and encouraged rather than commuters use private motor vehicles. The more private vehicles means more pollutants and heavier traffic congestion in the towns and cities.

Third, the existing jeepneys are already old and unsafe to traverse the mega city's avenues and streets and needs to be changed.

Fourth, because of global warming and environmental issues, we should shift into cleaner alternatives for the jeepneys. (e.g. do not use second hand engines)

Government should not only look into the development of the light railway systems but should improve the existing jeepney transport system.

A program of government with the active participation of the private sector should be drafted and executed for the re-invention of the jeepneys and the structures that support it the soonest time.

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