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AUGUST 2016 #143

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**TASK FORCE TRUCKS**
1955-'59 CHEVY PICKUPS

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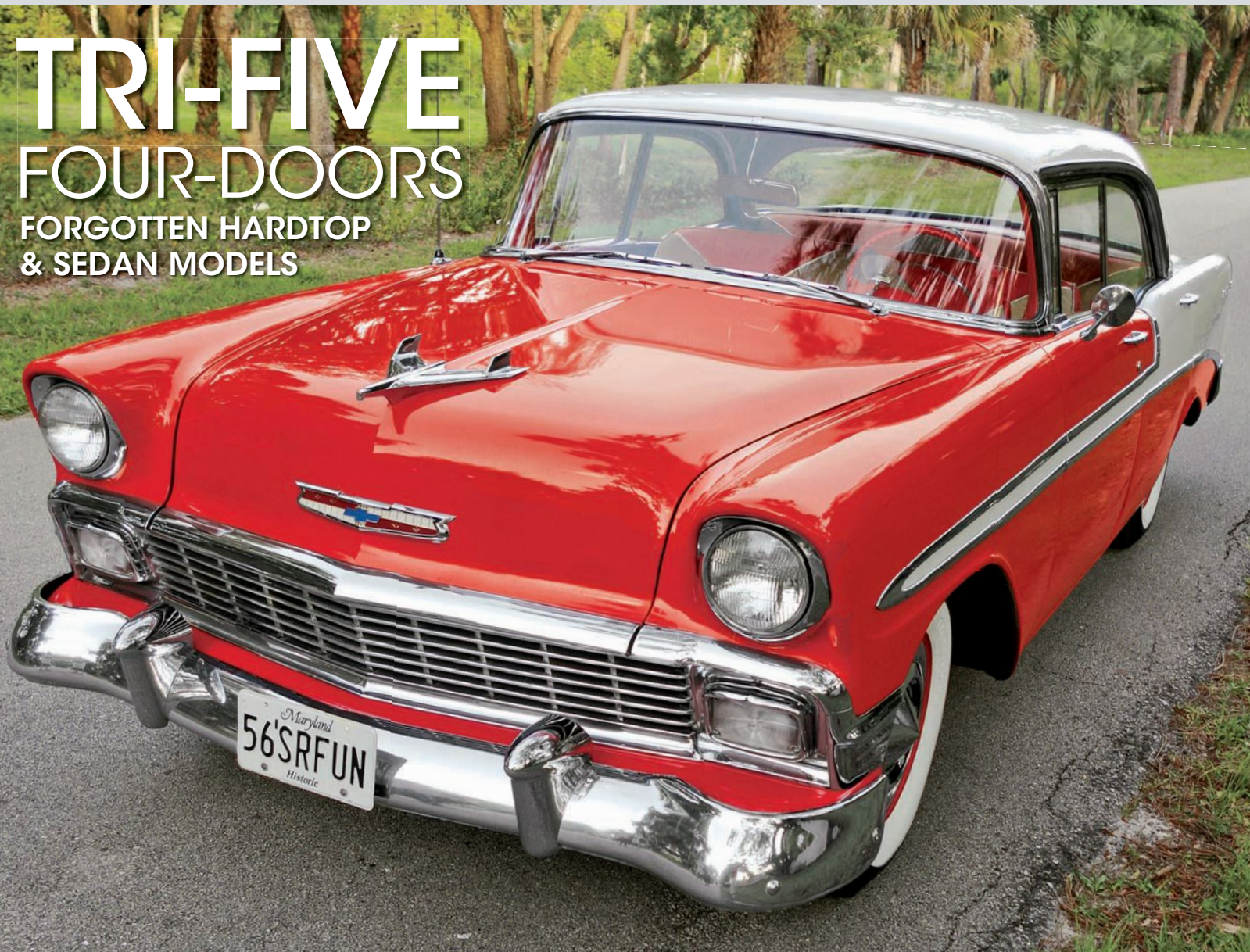


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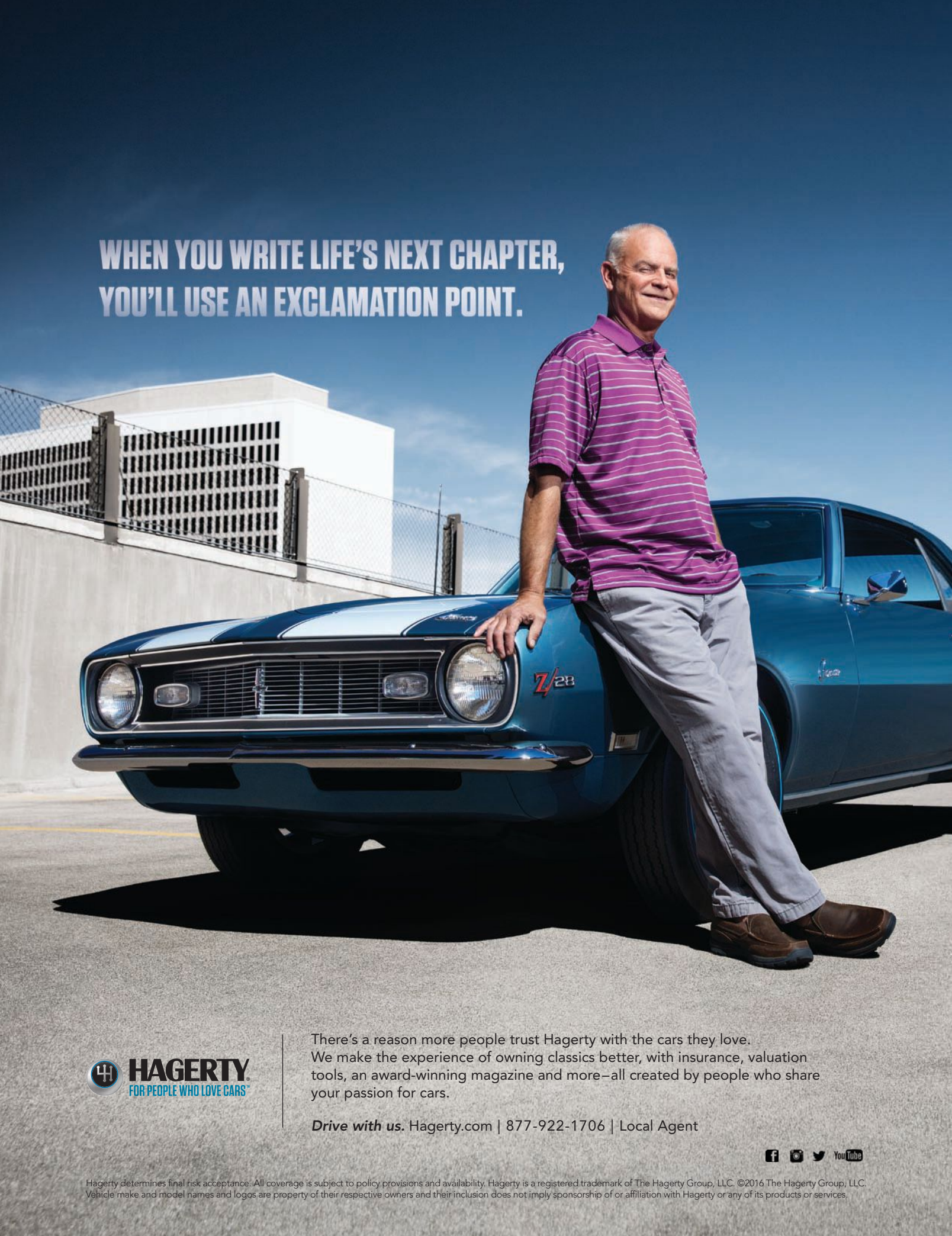


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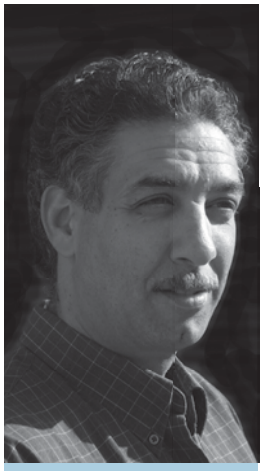

# Suburban Sensation

Rarely do cars stop me in my tracks, but this dark blue Suburban most certainly did.

On a regular basis, we learn of significant automobiles that are worthy of being featured in *Hemmings Classic Car*, but seldom, if ever, are those prospects Plymouths. So it was with great interest that I opened an envelope one day a few years ago containing a photograph of the incredible 1950 Plymouth Suburban featured in this issue on page 42. Rarely do cars stop me in my tracks, but this dark blue Suburban most certainly did.

What I like best about this conservatively styled American beauty is just that—its unadventurous, plain Jane appearance. It's all business, and nothing more. The deep-blue exterior is a real working-man's color, and with its equally plain blackwalls, the Suburban's no-frills appearance is a real treat. This is especially so today, in light of the many collector cars that end up dolled up to the max when they're being restored. I have always been a firm believer that less is more, as this Suburban certainly proves.

The other reason why this Suburban appeals to me so much is because there are no decorative distractions, aside from the small front and rear side spears, thin rocker panel molding and front bumper. Compared to other cars from this period, there isn't much of a grille, just a fairly simple surround highlighting the opening. There's no chrome or stainless trim around the windshield, the side windows, around the rain gutters, or even the wheel well openings. The wheels are painted the same color as the body, and those very basic hubcaps are a refreshing change from chrome wire wheels and other elaborately shaped full wheel covers that most cars came with at the time. It's because of this Plymouth's lack of decoration that my eyes aren't distracted elsewhere; rather, they stay focused on the car's shape, which better helps me appreciate the form that the stylists and designers were trying to achieve when they first set out to create this utilitarian wagon.

That's the thing about an overly decorated automobile with too much trim; you simply cannot appreciate the car's true form. Brightwork is nice, but it has to have been applied tastefully, and with restraint. While I understand that there are many car enthusiasts who don't like the minimalist look, preferring instead as much chrome and as many options as possible, you have to admit that it is refreshing and welcoming to see a car like this.

On a lesser scale, the same thinking can be applied to the 1956 Chevrolet four-door hardtop that's this month's cover car. Four door cars, be they hardtops or sedans, also seem to escape notice. Yet, they, too, represent the kinds of cars that the majority of American families bought back in the day. What makes this Tri-Five Chevy even more noteworthy is that the owner has resisted the temptation to swap out its factory-installed Blue Flame 140 straight-six engine for a V-8, a fate that befell way too many cars of this type. We all like lots of horsepower, but on today's crowded roads, that old Blue Flame does the job nicely; and, oh how smooth it is.

Aside from the optional underdash tissue dispenser, everything else about this four-door Bel Air is as basic as they come, including the expansive front bench seat, manual brakes and steering. It's a perfect representation of the way most automobiles rolled off the assembly line, and it needs to be preserved in all its original glory.

By coincidence, this month's Restoration Profile also happens to be an entry-level car—it's a 1953 Pontiac Pathfinder that was created for the Canadian market, and like the above-mentioned '56 Chevy, it too was equipped with a straight-six engine, this one being Pontiac's 239-cu.in. L-head engine.

I've been communicating with the Montreal-based owner of this Pathfinder for about 10 years now, beginning back when he first started its intense, body-off restoration. The story about what he had to do to restore his rare Pontiac back to the way it was first built is truly amazing, and his appreciation for the car the way it was made is especially admirable.

With so few basic, entry-level automobiles saved and restored to the way their frugal owners had first ordered them, cars like these are a welcome sight and need to be appreciated for what they are, not something that they could be.

Write to our executive editor at rlentinello@hemmings.com.

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BY TOM COMERRO

# Orphans at the River

**THE VETERAN MOTOR CAR CLUB OF AMERICA** will be hosting a tour around the Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, area. The tour is eligible specifically for orphan makes or any American company that is now defunct; cars must be over 25 years old. Recently ended marques such as Pontiac and Mercury are also welcome. The tour will take place along the Mississippi River and cover different museums in southwestern Wisconsin and northeastern Iowa. You must be a VMCCA member to participate, so be sure to visit their website and sign up if you'd like to attend. For more information, contact Marilyn Leys, Tour Registrar, at marl@centurytel.net or 608-326-0862.

# Lincoln Roundup

**THIS YEAR'S SECOND ANNUAL LINCOLN HOMECOMING** will take place August 10-14 in Hickory Corners, Michigan. The event is sponsored by the Lincoln Motor Car Heritage Museum and hosted by the Road Race Lincoln Registry. The event is open to all Lincoln clubs and Lincoln owners. The festivities will begin the 10th at the Gilmore Car Museum, with driving tours scheduled for August 11-12th in and around the area. The car show, corral, auction and swap meet of all things Lincoln will occur the 13-14th on the Gilmore Car Museum grounds. The car show on the final day will allow all Ford products built prior to 1990 to join the Lincolns. For a full itinerary, registration and hotel information, visit www.lcoc.org.

# Avanti Action

**AVANTI OWNERS, BE SURE TO MARK YOUR CALENDAR** for September 21-24, as the 2016 International Meet of Avanti Owners Association International will take place in Kansas City, Kansas. This year's meet will include a judged concours, member meetings and activities, and Avanti exhibits and tours that will highlight the Kansas City area. Among the destinations will be the National WWI Museum and Armacost Museum. The host hotel will be the Country Inn & Suites by Carlson in the Village West area. Full schedule, tour and registration information is available at www.heartlandAOAI.org.

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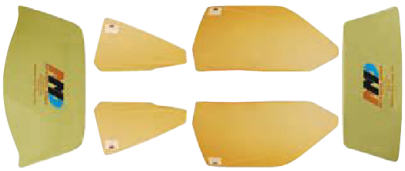

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BY DANIEL STROHL

# Galesville Limited

**IT'S AMAZING WHAT WE CAN FIND IN OUR OWN FILES WHEN WE GO DIGGING FOR** something completely unrelated. Take, for instance, this photo of the Galesville Limited, a homebuilt motorhome constructed by L. John Schilling of Galesville, Wisconsin.

Schilling was quite the personality, apparently. After studying engineering at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, he returned to his father's farm and began inventing, starting with an electric fence and moving on to automatic milkers.

Then in the early 1950s, after becoming mayor of his town and fathering eight children with his wife, Alette, he decided to see the country, so he built the motorhome, which according to the photo caption, had an engine at both ends and eating/sleeping/laundry facilities for the whole fam-damily. In it, the brood saw both coasts of the United States.

Of course, we'd love to know whatever happened to Schilling's motorhome. Might it still be rusting away in Wisconsin somewhere?

# Woodward's Wild Ride

**ON OUR FACEBOOK PAGE, ROCK ACE** Woodward shared a few photos of the custom three-wheeled car his uncle, Jerry Woodward, built in the Sixties, the Vortex X-2000, so we had to go digging for more information.

Jerry, as we found out, won the America's Most Beautiful Roadster award in 1957 with his quad-headlamp 1929 Ford named *Thunder Rod*, but he aimed for something far more off-the-beaten path five years later with the X-2000.

Using a scratch-built frame and body, the X-2000 had one wheel up front and two in the back as well as a hot-rodded 1952 Lincoln V-8 installed behind the seats and the stalk headrests. Woodward's intent was to maximize the car's streamlining, and it appears to have worked: He claimed a speed of 150 MPH on the Bonneville Salt Flats.


Incredibly, as of a 2013 online auction for the X-2000, it remains in original condition, still wearing its blue paint and plush white interior.

# RE: T-Bird with the Nest

**SEVERAL FOLKS RESPONDED TO OUR INQUIRY** for more information on the Thunderbird station wagon that Burgess Stengl sent us photos of a couple months back (see *HCC* #141) to let us know that Scott McGilvrey of Dallas, Texas, put the car together. And while we haven't yet heard from Scott, a couple folks were kind enough to send us scans of a Dallas Thunderbird club's newsletter that featured Scott's build.

As Scott told the story in the newsletter, the build was inspired by a photoshopped image that he thought was real. When he discovered the truth, he decided to make the car real, starting with a 1957 Thunderbird he'd already restored. The roof came from a junkyard station wagon, and while the end product makes it look like Scott simply welded one to the other, he in fact had to cut the roof apart and piece it back together one section at a time to fit the Thunderbird.

"I recognize that not everyone will like such a drastic modification to a classic T-Bird," Scott wrote, "but I love it."

**Recently discovered a unique or noteworthy classic car? Let us know. Photographs, commentary, questions and answers should be submitted to Lost & Found, c/o *Hemmings Classic Car*, P.O. Box 196, Bennington, Vermont 05201 or emailed to dstrohl@hemmings.com. For more Lost & Found, visit http://blog.hemmings.com/index.php/category/lost-and-found/.**

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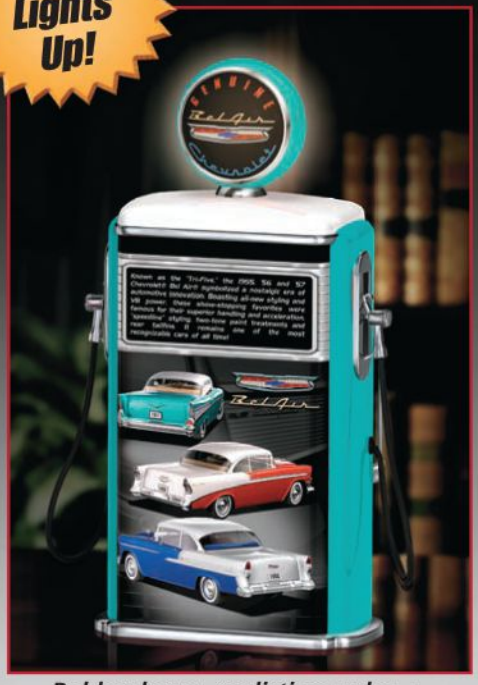

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**YES!** Please reserve the **"Tri-Five Bel Air® Gas Pump"** sculpture for me as described in this announcement.

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Allow 8 to 10 weeks after initial payment is received for shipment.

BY TOM COMERRO


# Hawkeye Petroliana

**RICH PENN AUCTIONS PRESENTS THE** Iowa Gas Auction, the opening event of the Iowa Gas Show, which is expected to sell over 500 lots of desirable petroliana, all without reserve. Porcelain and metal signs, displays, globes, pumps and a variety of other fuel-related memorabilia will all be available. The auction is slated to take place August 3 at noon in Des Moines at the Holiday Inn/Airport. Consignments are still being accepted, so if you're in the Midwest and want to sell some old petroliana, contact Rich Penn Auctions at 319-291-6688, or visit its site at www.richpennauctions.com.

# Palm Beach Results

**BARRETT-JACKSON CONCLUDED** its 14th annual Palm Beach Auction this April and saw total sales over $23.2 million. High-performance cars and exotics were a large part of the auction, but some nice classics were sold as well. This 1950 Studebaker Commander Starlight Coupe sold for $24,200. Powered by a numbers-matching 245-cu.in. engine and overdrive transmission, it was finished in Shenandoah Green with a tan houndstooth interior. A full list of results are now available at www.barrett-jackson.com. If you plan on being in the Las Vegas area this October, look for Barrett-Jackson.

## AUCTION PROFILE

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **CAR** | 1948 Nash Ambassador Suburban Sedan | **LOT NUMBER** | 786 |
| | | **CONDITION** | N/A |
| **AUCTIONEER** | Auctions America | **RESERVE** | None |
| **LOCATION** | Auburn, Indiana | **AVERAGE SELLING PRICE** | $67,000 |
| **DATE** | May 7, 2016 | **SELLING PRICE** | $63,250 |

**NASH'S AMBASSADOR CAME IN TWO LINES,** the Super and Custom. The Suburban was a part of the Super line and was a true "Woodie" of its day. Around 1,000 Suburbans were built between 1946 and '48, and it's estimated that 130 of them were made for 1948. With the maintenance required in keeping the wood body intact and the time-consuming restorations needed for your typical woodie, it's not surprising that few examples exist today.

This Ambassador was offered in maroon with wood paneling in a "sedanette" type style. The car underwent a body-off restoration and is powered by a 235-cu.in. OHV straight-six engine with a three-speed manual transmission with overdrive. The dashboard shows the correct Art Deco-inspired instrumentation, and the dash has the Weather Eye "conditioned air" unit. The Goodyear wide whitewalls are mounted on color-keyed steel wheels with trim rings and center caps. The original spare tire and jack, along with owner's manual and sales brochure were also included. Well bought.

# AUGUST Calendar

**3 • Rich Penn Auctions**
Des Moines, Iowa • 319-291-6688
www.richpennauctions.com

**6 • VanDerBrink Auctions**
Wells, Minnesota • 507-673-2517
www.vanderbrinkauctions.com

**13 • Silver Auctions**
Shelton, Washington • 800-255-4485
www.silverauctions.com

**18-20 • Mecum Auctions**
Monterey, California • 262-275-5050
www.mecumauctions.com

**18-20 • Russo & Steele**
Monterey, California • 602-252-2697
www.russoandsteele.com

**19 • Bonhams • Carmel, California**
415-391-4000 • www.bonhams.com

**19-20 • New England Auto Auction**
Owls Head, Maine • 207-594-4418
www.owlshead.org

**19-20 • RM Sotheby's Auctions**
Monterey, California • 519-352-4575
www.rmauctions.com

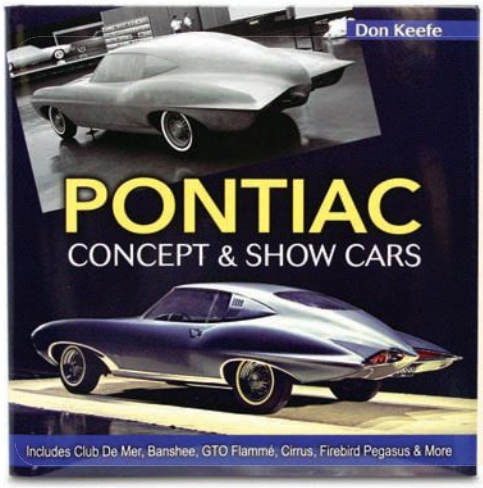
**20-21 • Gooding & Company**
Pebble Beach, California • 310-899-1960
www.goodingco.com

## Monterey Magic

**IT'S AUGUST, AND THAT MEANS** the classic car auction world will revolve around Pebble Beach and the surrounding area, with five different auctions scheduled to take place there between the 18th and the 21st. Last year's events offered some good deals, including this restored 1940 La Salle Series 52 that sold for $34,000 at Mecum. Expect to see cars of all eras and qualities up for sale during this busy weekend; visit each auction house's website for up-to-the-minute listings. Coverage of the auctions will be available online at our daily blog at blog.hemmings.com.

**View and search through thousands of upcoming auction vehicles in one place at the Hemmings Auction Showroom, www.hemmings.com/auctions/.**

BY MARK J. McCOURT




## Pontiac Concept & Show Cars

**800-551-4754 • WWW.CARTECHBOOKS.COM • $39.95**

Well-known Pontiac historian Don Keefe has created a book that all car enthusiasts—especially Pontiac owners—will greatly enjoy reading. It's the first in-depth book that focuses solely on all the unique concept and show cars that Pontiac created, including the Parisienne, Strato Streak, Club de Mer, X-400, and both Bonneville Specials. But more than just concept cars, Don explores the many special muscle cars that never were, such as the 1971 Firebird Pegasus, '73 Super Duty GTO and Grand Am station wagon, and the rarely seen '69 SE 101 steam-powered Grand Prix. From the 1939 Plexiglass-body World's Fair show car to the 2006 Supercharged LSX Solstice, Pontiac engineers were well known for creating the most outstanding concepts of any U.S. manufacturer, all of which are discussed right here in great detail.

*– BY RICHARD LENTINELLO*

## Padded Protection

**800-575-1932 • WWW.GENUINEHOTROD.COM • $25.97**

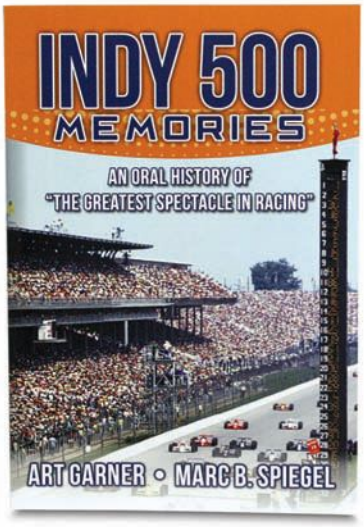
All it takes is one slip of the wrench or one forgotten belt buckle as you lean under the hood, and you've introduced a dent or scratch to your Blue Oval classic's fender paint. This durable cover—item #OYL-FG2135—is made of 1/8-inch-thick PVC cushioning and sized 22 x 34 inches. Its underside will stay put and protect your car's finish, and the officially licensed "Ford V8" printed topside has a non-slip nylon mesh finish to keep your tools where you set them down. It's a smart and inexpensive solution you won't want to go without.


## Indy 500

**877-907-8181 • WWW.COASTAL181.COM • $19.95**

It's always a challenge to try and capture the scope, enormity and century's sweep of history that is the Indianapolis 500. Video, still photography, narrative, nothing seems to do the Hoosier classic justice. This is a different approach. The authors—an award-winning historian and PR specialist, and a former PR maven for CART—have produced a very affordable 212-page paperback that gathers the oral recollections of scores of Indy acolytes, ranging from winners of the race to media types to mechanics, track workers and regular fans. These are intensely personal recollections of individual experiences at the track attempting to explain the powerful grip that Indianapolis has on lives, families and careers. It's an important, and hugely enjoyable, book to read.

*– BY JIM DONNELLY*




## 1955 Ford Mainline Ute

**INFO@MODELS56.COM.AU • WWW.MODELS56.COM.AU**

**$115 AU (ROUGHLY $86), PLUS $20 AU ($15 US) SHIPPING**

The stylish and practical car-based pickup—think Ranchero and El Camino—was an unusual, but popular choice in America for a period in the postwar years. But in Australia, this body style that they called the Coupe Utility, or "Ute" for short, began in the 1930s and endures to this day. The talented modelers at Sydney's Armco Model Cars have created a 1:43-scale resin replica of a Y-block V-8-powered 1955 Ford Mainline Coupe Utility. Our sample, number 62 out of 100, has no opening panels, but features beautiful two-tone paint, a detailed right hand-drive interior and lots of delicate brightwork. It's mounted on a plinth, under a clear cover, and is a rare treat and a great value for Ford fans.


Limited to the first 550 responders to this ad only!

*"Nothing says 'classic complication' more than a moon phase display..."*
— Rare Luxury Finds, Forbes

# Moon Lands On Man

*We've brought you the Moon for* ***under $90! Plus, FREE sunglasses!***

Long before Neil Armstrong took that one small step for man, our Moon has played a giant role in the history of mankind. From the ebb and flow of tides to crop harvests and maritime navigation to Old Blue Eyes crooning about romantic moments stolen in its glow, we've looked to Moon for matters of the head and the heart. It's no wonder watchmakers have dedicated their lives to perfecting a way to keep track of our lovely Luna.

We're happy to say we've brought you the moon... Capture the complicated and magical orbit of the moon in Stauer's ***Moon Phase Watch.*** We've priced this rare luxury timepiece for an astronomically low $87.50. Add a FREE pair of our top-selling navigator sunglasses and you have a deal that's quite simply out of this world.

**A collector's dream.** The moon phase complication is like a miniature version of the gear train that is our universe. Adding this beautiful complex function is no easy feat. That's why they're among the rarest and most expensive vintage watches ever sold at auction. Not long ago, an important moon phase timepieces fetched an incredible $5.7 million!

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**FREE**
**Stauer Flyboy Optics® Sunglasses**
**-a $99 value-**
**with purchase of Moon Phase Watch**

**We go to the moon and back for our clients.** We've been in the watch industry for decades and know more than a thing or two about getting the ultimate bang for our buck— which means we can pass the fruits of our know-how onto our clients. We've created a timepiece that's light years ahead of the competition. The experts tend to agree: *"I recently reviewed the movement and individual parts of the Stauer Moon Phase timepiece. The assembly and the precision of the moon phase movement are rarely seen."* — George Thomas, Renowned Watch Historian

*"This is the classiest watch I own! I have gotten many compliments on the style and the way it wears."*
— Ed from Cape Coral, FL

The ***Moon Phase Watch*** is an exquisite example of vintage style, boasting three different complications set in a striking guilloche face. A rose gold-finished case and a crocodile-embossed, genuine brown leather strap match artistry with durability.

**Your satisfaction is 100% guaranteed.** If you are not convinced you got luxury for less, simply return the ***Moon Phase Watch*** within 60 days for a full refund of the item sale price. You can even keep the sunglasses for your trouble. But we have a feeling you're going to be over the moon about this timepiece. This kind of watch (and deal) only comes around once in a blue moon. So take a historical step and call us today!

**78% OFF INSTANTLY! When you use your Offer Code**

**Stauer Moon Phase Watch** ~~$399~~†

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## 1967 Buick Wildcat

**800-718-1866 • WWW.DIECASTDIRECT.COM • $129.95**

Long, low lines characterized Buick's emphatically-styled 1967 Wildcat Sport Coupe, whose ground-hugging two-ton weight was neatly offset by its new 430-cu.in., 360hp V-8 engine. England's The Brooklin Collection—long known to favor GM's venerable Flint division—has done a great job rendering this massive hardtop in 1:43 scale. Painted flawless Blue Mist Poly—a color highlighted in the showroom brochure—over a Saddle bench seat interior, and accented with ample bright body trim, this hefty model really looks the business.

## Plates of America

**800-423-5525 • WWW.CALCARCOVER.COM • $54.99**

It's challenging and expensive to collect license plates from all 50 U.S. states, and displaying them can take up an entire wall. Here's a clever and creative solution: Every state is represented in a map of the USA, with each state's shape overlaid with an image of its license plate. This colorful 18 x 12-inch display (item #PS353) has a weathered, three-dimensional look and is handmade from heavy-gauge American steel, mounted to a rustic wood frame. It will look equally good in the den or in the garage.

## Practice What You Preach

**240-686-0229 • CORYDRAW@GMAIL.COM**
**CHRISTMAS CARDS, PACK OF 13- $20;**
**LIMITED-EDITION PRINTS- $25-75; COMMISSIONS START AT $600**

It takes a special gift and an extra helping of patience to be an educator, and when you combine that professional calling with a natural artistic gift and a lifelong passion for cars, you have a unique talent like Cory Correll. He's an associate art professor at Montgomery College in Rockville, Maryland, who supplements his income with renderings for a high-end architecture firm and creates automotive fine art on commission.

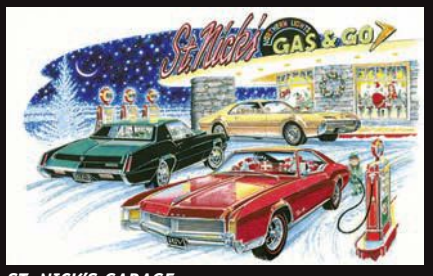
"I've been drawing since I was three, according to Mom and Dad, I would stand on the transmission hump in the back seat of our 1957 Chevrolet wagon and look out over his shoulder to identify the other cars on the road," Cory tells us. "From when I was little, I wanted to be a car designer. I studied industrial design in school. And I've been active in the old-car hobby for 25 years; I own a 1966 Oldsmobile Toronado, and am chairman of the annual All-GM Show at the college."

Cory typically works in pen and ink, markers and watercolors, the latter being his favorite medium. "But it's unforgiving—you can't make mistakes. Now you can use Photoshop to correct this, but I do things the old-fashioned way. When I work with markers, I'll do a black and white drawing first, make copies, and color in those black and white copies. That way, if there's a mistake, I don't have to start again from scratch."

One of his recent automotive projects was creating an Indianapolis 500-themed T-shirt design for the next All-GM Show, and he continues to work on his popular annual Christmas card illustrations. After having his automotive fine art displayed in a recent exhibit at the college, Cory is creating a website to bring his portfolio to the world. His pieces can be reproduced as one-off and limited-edition giclées in many sizes; contact the artist for details.

*1956 NOMAD*

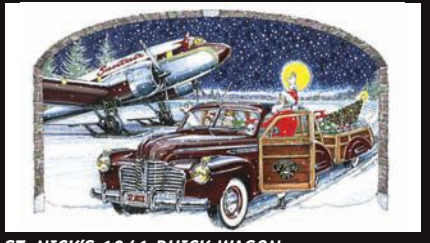
*1957 BEACH BIRD*




*ST. NICK'S GARAGE*


*1971 PLUM CRAZY CHARGER R-T*


*1971 CORVETTE COUPE*



*ST. NICK'S 1941 BUICK WAGON*

# A LEGACY OF PROTECTION

*The smell of vintage leather. The gleam of fresh carnauba wax.*
*An open country road on a sunny day.*
*We're driven by our senses and inspired by our dreams.*


**Ford Heacock**
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*I guess you can buy peace of mind.*




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BY TOM COMERRO


## Controlled Inflation

BendPak's Hush-Quiet rotary-screw air compressor can meet the compressed-air demands of high-volume repair facilities and dealerships. It's the perfect compressor if you work in a noise-conscious area, as the super-silenced insulated enclosure will keep it quiet, while the unique design results in trouble-free operation with no need to worry about piston rings, valves, rod-inserts, bushings and pistons. There are no valve components to service, reducing long-term operating costs. The pump style is a rotary screw that traps air between two contra-rotating rotors. As the rotors intermesh, they reduce the volume of trapped air and deliver it compressed, at the proper pressure level. Visit BendPak for an extensive list of features and specs. Cost: $4,250.

**BENDPAK**
**805-933-9970**
**WWW.BENDPAK.COM**

## Chevy Cowl Lens

The Filling Station is now offering new cowl lenses for 1932-'34 Chevrolet cars and trucks. The lenses are copied from the originals and are exact in every detail. The "Stimsonite" script is on the face of the glass for a factory-correct look. The lenses replace GM #914699 and are made with brand-new tooling. Cost: $29.50 each or $55/pair.

**THE FILLING STATION**
**800-841-6622**
**WWW.FILLINGSTATION.COM**

## Latch Assemblies

Door hardware has a tendency of wearing out after several decades of use. When the latches and strikers wear, your car's doors will often stop opening smoothly or closing securely. Classic Industries has new reproduction parts for the Tri-Five Chevy, 1958-'60 Impala and full-size models. The striker plates fit both front and rear doors, ensuring all doors shut tightly and stay closed. They are designed to accurately replace the original parts found on the 150, 210, Bel Air and Impala. The latches are offered for 1955-'57 two-door Chevy models. They feature original-style stamped-steel construction and are designed to ensure smooth operation for years to come. Cost: $39.99/pair (striker plate); $99.95/each (door latch assembly).

**CLASSIC INDUSTRIES PARTS & ACCESSORIES**
**855-357-2787**
**WWW.CLASSICINDUSTRIES.COM**

## Heat Shield

Thermo Tec's pipe shield features a modern high-tech appearance with a strong, durable stainless steel exterior. This barrier is a great way to protect sensitive parts and lines from the radiant heat from hot exhaust pipes. The six-inch-wide shield includes stainless steel clamps and is easy to install. The stainless steel construction provides added performance and durability with the ability to block over 90 percent of radiant heat from going in a specific direction. The flexible shield is available in one- and two-foot lengths. Cost: $59 (MSRP 1 foot); $84 (MSRP 2 foot).

**THERMO TEC**
**800-274-8437**
**WWW.THERMOTEC.COM**

## Blue Oval Braking

Bob Drake specializes in parts for old Fords and has a new line of brake parts to add stopping power to your Ford car or truck. Brake shoes, wheel cylinders and master cylinders are available for many postwar vehicles from 1949-'58, including Thunderbirds. Front and rear shoes will fit 1949-'54 Ford cars, and front shoes will also fit the 1949-'51 wagons. Front and rear wheel cylinders are available for all cars 1949-'59 and will also fit 1955-'56 F-100s. The master cylinders will fit 1952-'56 cars and 1955-'60 Thunderbirds. Other parts, including cables and hardware are also available. Contact Bob Drake for your application today. Cost: brake shoes, $45/set front or rear; wheel cylinder, $35 each; master cylinder, $105.

**BOB DRAKE REPRODUCTIONS**
**800-221-3673**
**WWW.BOBDRAKE.COM**

Urgent: Special Summer Driving Notice

**To some, sunglasses are a fashion accessory…**

# But When Driving, These Sunglasses May Save Your Life!

**Drivers' Alert:** Driving can expose you to more dangerous glare than any sunny day at the beach can… do you know how to protect yourself?

*Studies by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) show that most (74%) of the crashes occurred on clear, sunny days*

Navigator™ Black Stainless Steel Sunglasses

The sun rises and sets at peak travel periods, during the early morning and afternoon rush hours and many drivers find themselves temporarily blinded while driving directly into the glare of the sun. Deadly accidents are regularly caused by such blinding glare with danger arising from reflected light off another vehicle, the pavement, or even from waxed and oily windshields that can make matters worse. Early morning dew can exacerbate this situation. Yet, motorists struggle on despite being blinded by the sun's glare that can cause countless accidents every year.

**Not all sunglasses are created equal.** Protecting your eyes is serious business. With all the fancy fashion frames out there it can be easy to overlook what really matters—the lenses. So we did our research and looked to the very best in optic innovation and technology.

**Sometimes it does take a rocket scientist. A NASA rocket scientist.** Some ordinary sunglasses can obscure your vision by exposing your eyes to harmful UV rays, blue light, and reflective glare. They can also darken useful vision-enhancing light. But now, independent research conducted by scientists from NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory has brought forth ground-breaking technology to help protect human eyesight from the harmful effects of solar radiation light. This superior lens technology was first discovered when NASA scientists looked to nature for a means to superior eye protection—specifically, by studying the eyes of eagles, known for their extreme visual acuity. This discovery resulted in what is now known as Eagle Eyes®.


**Slip on a pair of Eagle Eyes® and everything instantly appears more vivid and sharp. You'll immediately notice that your eyes are more comfortable and relaxed and you'll feel no need to squint. The scientifically designed sunglasses are not just fashion accessories—they are necessary to protect your eyes from those harmful rays produced by the sun during peak driving times.**

**The Only Sunglass Technology Certified by the Space Foundation for UV and Blue-Light Eye Protection.** Eagle Eyes® features the most advanced eye protection technology ever created. The TriLenium® Lens Technology offers triple-filter polarization to block 99.9% UVA and UVB—plus the added benefit of blue-light eye protection. Eagle Eyes® is the only optic technology that has earned official recognition from the Space Certification Program for this remarkable technology. Now, that's proven science-based protection.

**The finest optics: And buy one, get one FREE!** Eagle Eyes® has the highest customer satisfaction of any item in our 20 year history. We are so excited for you to try the Eagle Eyes® breakthrough technology that we will give you a **second pair of Eagle Eyes® Navigator™ Sunglasses FREE—a $99 value!**

That's two pairs to protect your eyes with the best technology available for less than the price of one pair of traditional sunglasses. You get a pair of Navigators with stainless steel black frames and the other with stainless steel gold, plus one hard zipper case and one micro-fiber drawstring cleaning pouch are included. Keep one pair in your pocket and one in your car.

**Your satisfaction is 100% guaranteed.** If you are not astounded with the Eagle Eyes® technology, enjoying clearer, sharper and more glare-free vision, simply return one pair within 60 days for a full refund of the purchase price. The other pair is yours to keep. No one else has such confidence in their optic technology.Don't leave your eyes in the hands of fashion designers, entrust them to the best scientific minds on earth.

**Receive the Navigator™ Gold Sunglasses** (*a $99 value*) **FREE! just for trying the Navigator™ Black**

Navigator™ Gold Stainless Steel Sunglasses

Certified EAGLE EYES® was developed from original NASA Optic technology and was recently inducted into the Space Foundation Technology Hall of Fame.

**Fit-ons available for $39** +S&H
Black or Tortoise-Shell design

Wear your Eagle Eyes® **Navigators** with absolute confidence, knowing your eyes are protected with technology that was born in space for the human race.

**Eagle Eyes® Navigator™ Sunglasses** ~~$99~~†
Offer Code Price **$49** + S&P **Save $50**
***PLUS*** **receive the Navigator™ Gold absolutely FREE!—2 pairs for the price of one!**

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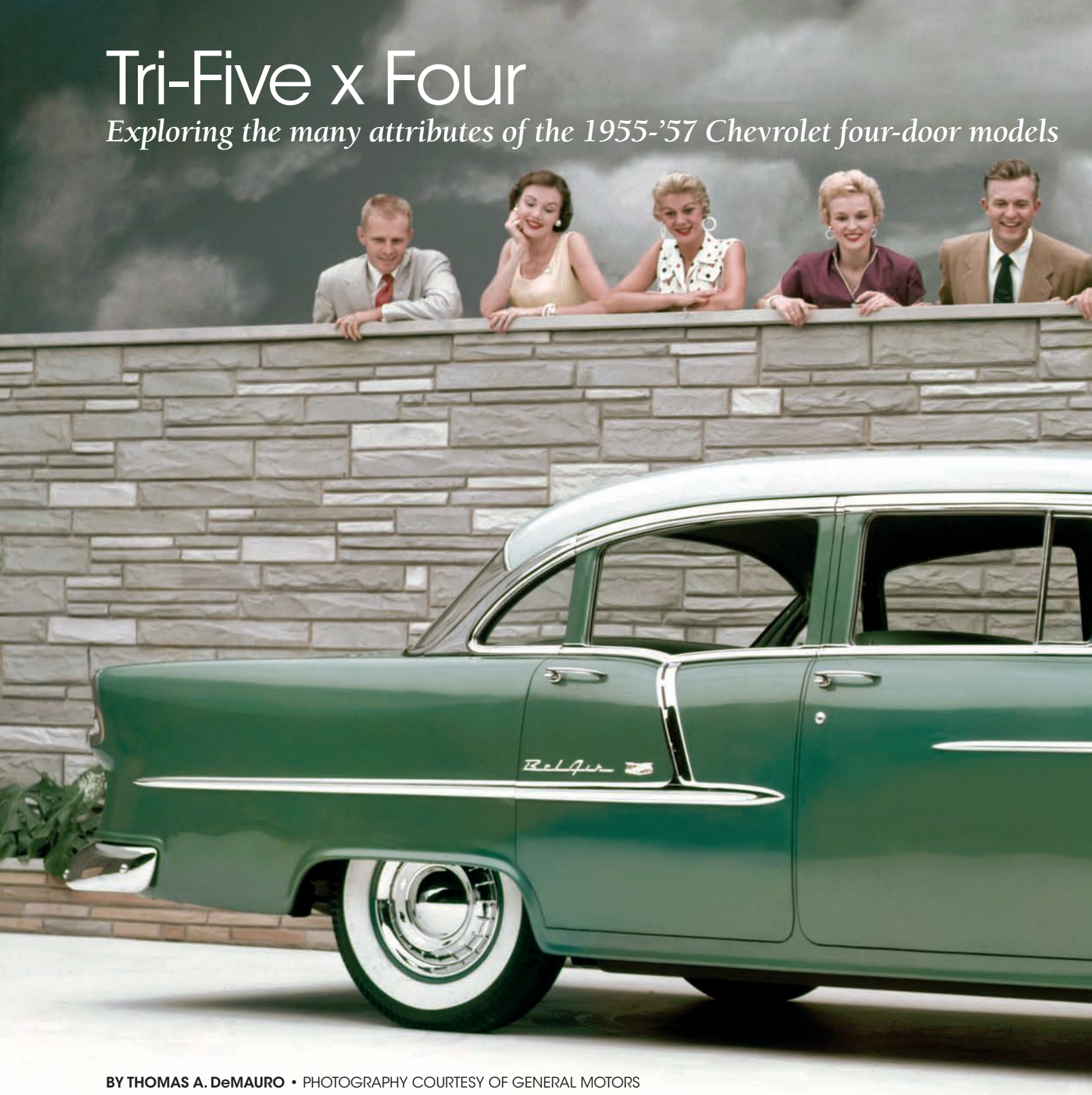
BBB ACCREDITED BUSINESS **Rating of A+**

† *Special price only for customers using the offer code versus the price on Stauer.com without your offer code.*

*Smart Luxuries—Surprising Prices™*

# Tri-Five x Four

*Exploring the many attributes of the 1955-'57 Chevrolet four-door models*




**BY THOMAS A. DeMAURO** • PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF GENERAL MOTORS

National optimism was at its peak in the 1950s. The middle class grew to 60 percent of the population, science and technology advanced rapidly, the space race launched and the Federal Aid Highway Act sanctioned the building of a 41,000-mile network of Interstates to make high-speed travel by car easier and safer in years to come.

With more breadwinners commuting from the suburbs to work and two-car families on the rise, automakers were implementing more progressive ideas to meet the escalating expectations of consumers. General Motors' Chevrolet Division, a leader

1955 BEL AIR

not only in the low-priced field, but also the perennial top seller in the U.S. market, made an indelible mark on automotive history with its 1955-'57 models.

## 1955

Inspired designs and engineering advancements characterized the 1955 offerings with new bodies, interiors, chassis, differential and of course, an overhead-valve V-8 engine. Styling followed the "lower and longer" philosophy of the day, thus the vehicle height was 2.6 inches lower at 60.5 inches, the hood line 3.5 inches lower and the deck lid 3.3 inches lower than the 1954 model. Hooded headlamps, a forward-canted grille and parking lamps, projecting bumpers, and the rear quarter-panel shape conspired to create the impression of length and motion when in fact, the 1955 model rode on the same 115-inch wheelbase as the '54 and was nearly an inch shorter at 195.6 inches and narrower at 74 inches. Yet interior room grew.

A wraparound windshield and larger side windows and backlite increased visibility. The beltline dipped on the rear doors, the body sides were smooth save the decorative trim, and an unbro-


ken bead in the body panels outlined the wheel-wells and rocker panels. The new door handle design would be retained in its basic form on various GM models into the 1970s.

Integrated into the rear quarter-panels were wraparound taillamps with chrome "V" emblems mounted under each on V-8 models. The deck lid was flatter and the rear bumper shape mimicked the front. A new plenum chamber cowl improved the ventilation system, but also added structural stiffness due to its double-walled box section composition. Overall torsional rigidity was increased despite the fact that the box girder frame was now 18 percent lighter.

New spherical joints (ball joints) were used in the revised front suspension, control arms gained rubber bushings and the coil springs and shocks were mounted at an angle to better follow the arc of the lower control arm's movement. Steering system geometry improved, operation was smoother and effort and road shock transfer were reduced via a new recirculating ball-nut steering box and its relay-type linkage.

Rear springs were nine inches longer, and the leaves were thicker and wider. They were mounted further apart and outside of the frame to increase stability. The center of gravity was reduced by about a ½-inch, and the tread widened to 58/58.8 inches front/rear. Tubeless 6.70 x 15 tires became standard and were mounted on 15 x 5-inch wheels.

Handling was markedly improved, and the transfer of road harshness to the passengers and periodic maintenance were reduced. Using ball joints also allowed geometry to prevent diving while braking to be built in. The 11-inch brake drums were retained, and the master cylinder was relocated for easier servicing and use with the new suspended pedal system.

Inside, a broad trim piece divided the instrument panel horizontally. On the passenger side, the speaker grille mirrored the hooded, quadrant-shaped gauge cluster on the driver side. The latter was flanked by the light switch and lighter (except in the One-Fifty). The optional radio was in the center. Other switches and controls and the centrally-located glovebox were in the lower tier. A new concentric-type gear-shift control shaft was housed within the steering column, the seats had more rounded contours, and their upholstery and the door panel designs were revised from the 1954 cars.

The OHV V-8 engine's displacement was 265-cu.in. with a 3.75-inch bore x 3.00-inch stroke, and it contained a forged-steel crankshaft and connecting rods, cast aluminum pistons, wedge-type combustion chambers, a ball-stud rocker arm system, and a compression ratio of 8:1. It produced 162hp with a two-barrel carburetor and single exhaust and was lighter than the inline six. A "Plus-Power Package" (aka. Power-Pack) added a four-barrel, a higher capacity air cleaner and dual exhaust, resulting in 180hp.

Revisions were made to the standard one-barrel 235.5-cu. in. Blue Flame straight-six engine for more efficient packaging. It was uprated to 123hp from 115. The optional six-cylinder, for use with the Powerglide two-speed automatic, received the same updates and a more aggressive cam and hydraulic lifters for 136hp. A four-point dynamically balanced mounting system was used for all engines, a 12-volt electrical system replaced the 6-volt one, and the fuel pump was reengineered.

Mated to the six-cylinder was a 9.5-inch clutch; V-8s used a 10-inch (H.D. 11-inch) assembly. The standard three-speed manual transmission got increases in torque capacity and reliability. New for 1955, was the optional "Touch-Down Overdrive" that com-

bined the three-speed with a 0.70:1 overdrive unit. It was paired with a 4.11 rear gear. The standard rear gear was 3.70 for the three-speed and 3.55 for the Powerglide, which was redesigned to improve durability, servicing and operation. The Hotchkiss Drive rear end could handle higher torque and was more durable than the previously used Torque Tube Drive.

The all-weather A/C system was new for 1955, and a host of other options and accessories were also available.

Chevrolet's series that included a four-door sedan were 1500 (A with I-6 or VA with V-8), 2100 (B or VB) and 2400 (C or VC), and the models were the One-Fifty (or 150), Two-Ten (or 210) and Bel Air, respectively.

1500—was the "standard" series. It featured hood and deck lid emblems, as well as a bright metal-trimmed grille, hood ornament, door and deck lid handles, bumper guards and headlamp, parking lamp and taillamp bezels and Chevrolet script on the fenders. Hubcaps were included.

2100—was the "deluxe" series. Added to the 1500's equipment was a rear fender spear that met a diagonal extension from the beltline dip on the rear doors. Bright trim for the windshield, backlight and side window sills was also added.

2400—was the top-of-the-line "luxury" series. A front fender spear rode along the fender character line that began at the headlamp hood. The rear door and quarter panel spear featured white paint and the "Bel Air" script and crest above it. All windows were trimmed in bright metal and full wheel covers were standard.

Various solid body colors were offered, and the bright side trim served as borders for the two-tone paint choices. Interior trim designs, materials and equipment differed between each series for all three years with the Bel Air's the most opulent and the "One-Fifty's" the most basic. Those details are too numerous to list here.

## 1956

Sales records were broken for 1955, but major styling updates for 1956 were already completed. The four-door hardtop Sport Sedan with its stylish roof treatment for the 2100 and 2400 series was also new. Its short center pillar was heavily reinforced and gained additional support from a wider base, and two body mounts moved directly under it.

All models received a bright wall-to-wall prowed grille with rectangular parking lamps set into it, wider headlamp hoods, longer, flatter hood and a reshaped bumper and guards. In the front and rear, a large "V" paired with a smaller version of the shield denoted a V-8. Bright wraparound trim extended from the grille onto fenders with revised character lines, wheel opening shapes were swept-back and reworked body side trim was employed. In the rear were new taillamps (the driver side hiding the fuel filler door) and bumper.

Different in design for 1956, the bright side trim and various moldings were still used to differentiate between the three series, and that would remain true for 1957. Solid and two-tone paint choices were again offered. Bodies grew 1.9 inches to 197.5 inches. Wheel covers were new, but only the hubcap's accent paint color changed.

A 140hp Blue-Flame six-cylinder engine with a high-lift camshaft, hydraulic lifters and an 8:1 compression ratio became standard with all transmissions. The 162hp Turbo-Fire 265-cu.in. V-8 was carried over for manual transmissions, but V-8 engines paired with the Powerglide received a higher-lift cam for 170hp. A 9.25:1 compression ratio and high-lift cam increased the Power Pack engine rating to 205hp. Also optional, at 225hp, the Corvette engine had dual four-barrel carbs, dual exhaust, a 9.25:1 compression ratio and other enhancements.

The Power Pack's clutch was revised for a higher torque capacity, and a close-ratio three-speed was added at mid-season. Rear gear ratios were carried over. A more reliable battery, a waterproof voltage regulator and revised wiring harnesses were employed, and turn signals graduated from the option list to standard. Front spring rates were reduced to soften the ride, and caster was added to improve directional stability. Rear spring hangers were widened one inch for durability, and the wheel bearings were improved. Interior patterns and materials were updated and seatbelts and shoulder harnesses were new extra-cost accessories, as was an instrument panel pad.

## 1957

Though the series stayed the same, the body was boldly restyled yet again for 1957. It was 2.5 inches longer at 200 inches and slightly lower and narrower at 73.9 inches wide. Its grille and massive integrated bumper with conical guards dominated the front end, forming a wide-mouthed countenance large enough for a horizontal bar to house the Chevrolet shield and the parking lamps. A lower, flatter hood was adorned with two raised areas with rocket-like ornaments at their leading edges. "Chevrolet" script and a larger "V", front and rear, denoted the V-8. Revised fenders featured a rib at the top. Large headlamp bezels incorporated grilled air intakes in their upper section to feed outside air to ducting for the new ventilation system that replaced the plenum-type. This also allowed for a one-inch lower cowl, resulting in more windshield glass area.

New sweeping side trim split halfway across the rear door and widened to highlight the fin. The Bel Air had a rolled, anodized, fluted insert in the field between the trim pieces and the Two-Ten had paint, but the One-Fifty's trim was similar to the 1955 Bel Air's, just narrower.

Dramatic rear fins terminated at chrome housings (the left one contained the fuel door) with new low-set taillamps. Rear bumper guards accepted accessory backup lamps. Though offered in solid colors, each series had its own available two-tone paint treatment. The Bel Air also had gold anodizing on its grille, vertical D-shaped fender louvers and emblems. Wheel discs and hubcaps were new designs.

The Turbo-Fire 283-cu.in. V-8 had a larger 3.875-inch bore, while retaining the same 3.00-inch stroke of the 265 engine. Durability, ignition performance and intake and exhaust flow were improved, and it was available with new Rochester "Ramjet" mechanical fuel injection. Available with the automatic transmission only, the 283 two-barrel produced 185hp, with 8.5 compression. The Super Turbo-Fire four-barrel, dual-exhaust version at 9.5:1 was rated at 220hp.

The 9.5:1 283 "Corvette V-8s" with two-four-barrels were rated at 245hp and 270hp with a competition cam. Fuel injected 283s produced 250hp and 283hp with a competition cam and a 10.5:1 compression ratio.

The 140hp 235-cu.in. Blue-Flame six-cylinder was retained, and the 162hp Turbo-Fire 265-cu.in. V-8 was only available with the manual transmission.

Optional with the 283, the new Turboglide automatic featured variable torque multiplication for smooth operation and a hill-retarder feature. Its aluminum case saved 88-pounds over the Powerglide, but durability issues early on withered buyer confidence.

A close-ratio three-speed was available with the "Corvette V-8s," but was required behind the 270hp and 283hp versions. The Turboglide and Powerglide were paired with a 3.36 rear gear, the three-speed manual a 3.55 and the overdrive 4.11. Positraction was a new option for 1957. A softer ride and somewhat lowered ride height, were provided by smaller 14-inch wheels with wider 7.50 x 14 lower-pressure tires.

The cluster was completely redesigned inside, and featured a round speedometer flanked by smaller round temp and gas gauges with warning lamps and turn signal indicators above them. A cove housed the switch gear and the optional radio and clock, and the speaker moved to the top center of the panel. On the lower tier were the heater controls and centrally-placed ashtray and glovebox. The steering wheel was new, the front seat backrests were redesigned for a slimmer appearance; upholstery choices, door panel patterns and armrests were revised.

The four-door hardtop sport had the rearview mirror relocated to the dash top garnish molding for better rear visibility. The A/C system and the radios were redesigned, and the pushbutton radios were transistorized.


Distinctive styling, low pricing and high-performance options made the Tri-Five Chevrolets popular when new. The winning reputation bolstered by their NASCAR, drag racing and other motorsports exploits and vast aftermarket speed and restoration parts support for both the cars and the small-block Chevy engine helped them develop an enormous following and achieve automotive and pop-culture icon status over the six decades since then.

Two-door models command higher prices today than the four-door cars, but checking the photos here reveals that additional doors didn't diminish the Tri-Fives' classic styling, especially in the '56 and '57 hardtop sport models.

Though Ford edged out Chevrolet in model (but not calendar) year sales for the first time in many seasons in 1957, these three mid-century masterpieces remain highly desirable representations of the optimism of the era, regardless of whether they have two doors or four.

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# Inline Icon

## *You don't need a small-block V-8 to drive a cool 1956 Bel Air four-door Sport Sedan*

**BY JIM DONNELLY**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD LENTINELLO

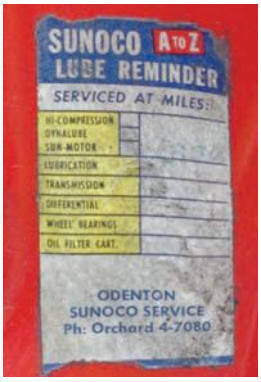
You might be senior enough to remember those old hot rod manuals with smeary print that you could stick in the back pocket of your rolled-up Levis.

Lots of ads for sellers of flathead Ford speed parts. Lots of copy in those ads to the effect of "six in a row will never go." To which we respond, balderdash. This hardtop has been getting along quite nicely with Stovebolt power. Not only that, it's been in the extended family of the current owner since it was brand new in Maryland. And it's a Chevrolet Bel Air hardtop out of 1956, from that triumvirate of sacred Tri-Five years, only it's a four-door hardtop. With the Stovebolt, three-on-the-tree and overdrive. And yes, it's all original, including the paint.

If this catches your attention as somehow aberrant, take a break. Straight-sixes and four-door models served Chevrolet admirably in 1956. The issue's that unless the Bel Air in question is a two-door hardtop and packing a Corvette-bred 265-cu.in. small-block V-8—to say nothing of a Continental kit—you're unlikely to see one either on a show field or in the pages of an enthusiast magazine. Sure, the small-block was already considered a performance benchmark in its second year of existence, but a Stovebolt has an incredibly rich history, too, which we'll discuss in a moment. But let us run some numbers first. In 1956, Chevrolet produced a few more than 1.6 million cars spread across three model series; Bel Air, Two-Ten and One-Fifty. According to the Vintage Chevrolet Club of America, 366,293 four-door Bel Air hardtops were produced in 1956, representing about 20 percent of total assembly among seven body styles, including the Nomad.

Officially, in bowtie-speak, the pillarless four-door was known as the Sport Sedan. And among these, 103,602 were delivered with the 235-cu.in. Stovebolt. That's a substantial quantity of cars. And because they weren't considered instant restoration fodder, they weren't maintained in big numbers. We'll pull up a little short of calling a Bel Air hardtop like this one a rarity, but face it, they aren't seen nearly as much as two-door hardtops, convertibles and Nomads on the shine-and-show circuit today.

The coming of the Sport Sedan was new for 1956, as there was no corresponding body style from the previous year. So what, then, makes a 1956 Chevrolet. It obviously boasts an evolutionary appearance but when you get to what constitutes its look, the changes from 1955 were comparably minor. The biggest visual upgrade stemmed from the simple step of opening up the wheel arches and giving them a pronounced teardrop shape,


**Modern premium fuel and zinc-rich racing oil keep this later-generation Stovebolt happy. That old Sunoco sticker out of Baltimore shows the Bel Air was rigorously maintained by a proud owner. Exhaust tip extension is always a popular Chevrolet accessory.**

as opposed to the squared-off openings of the inaugural Tri-Five year. The effect was dramatic, set off by a revamp of the taillamps and the headlamp brows. Really, it did look like a substantially new car, at least until 1957 model came along.

Theoretically, the Stovebolt six can trace its lineage to 1929. From 1919 to 1929, Chevrolets, like most low-priced vehicles of the era, were powered exclusively by four-cylinder engines. Chevrolet introduced its first six-cylinder engine in 1929—a "Six in the price range of the four" to quote period advertising—displacing 194 cubic inches, its crankshaft running in three main bearings. A lot of fans list its introduction as the point where Chevrolet started beating Ford regularly in annual sales. The name "Stovebolt," by the way, is of uncertain origin but may refer to stove-like fasteners used on the early engines to secure the side plate that covers the tappets.

Stovebolt displacement rose to 216 cubic inches and then to 235. Its availability was extended to light and medium trucks, although those are different, purpose-built engines. The first six, dating to 1929, maxed out at 206.8 cubic inches by 1936, but there was also a 181-cu.in. version used concurrently with the 194 and the 206. In 1937, Chevrolet introduced a new 216-cu.in. OHV straight-six with four main bearings, which was bored and stroked to 235 cubic inches for use in trucks in 1941, a combination that lasted until 1949. The following year, Chevrolet introduced the Powerglide and modified that preexisting truck engine for installation in passenger cars. It had a higher-deck block and freer-breathing head with larger valves. Displacement was set at 235 cubic inches for use in Powerglide-equipped passenger cars, and it became standard equipment in 1953. Two facts amaze: The Stovebolt, despite having existed in several forms and displacements, remained in production until 1962, and more than a few of them were very competitive in drag and oval racing.

So, mix the production numbers, powertrain and year of manufacturer together here, and a desirable Chevrolet from the most classic Fifties years will pop out. Bill Clark, who owns our feature car today, literally grew up with the car. Bill was living in Severn, Maryland, when his Uncle Fritz bought the Bel Air from the inventory of A.D. Anderson Chevrolet in Baltimore in March



**This was high style, circa 1956. Lavish application of dashboard chrome is a perfect offset for the diamond-tufted upholstery, in matching colors, that makes the rear seat so cozy. Tissue dispenser was a popular accessory, as was the traffic signal viewer atop dash.**

1956. "My two brothers and I, I guess we were six, eight and 10 years old, you know, we'd watch Dinah Shore with our dad, and she'd sing about seeing the U.S.A. in your Chevrolet. So we were really interested in the new-design Chevys that were coming for 1955. Dad's 1956 four-door sedan in turquoise was the first car I ever drove, but I always thought that Uncle Fritz's car, with those curved rear roof pillars, just looked cooler. Harley Earl designed it, it had great lines, it's roomy, it has lots of chrome, and I loved its colors [for the record, they're Matador Red and Dune Beige, with a matching cloth-and-vinyl interior] and its polished, stainless steel full hubcaps. The hardtop lines add a sleekness to its look.

"When I was eight years old, I started asking Uncle Fritz if I could buy his car," Bill recalls. "Thirty-five years later, my aunt Melva called me, and I bought it one hour later. That was in 1991."

Bill was one of nine children, and both 1956 Chevrolets were pressed into service during monthly family picnics at various relatives' houses in the Baltimore area. He kept telling Uncle Fritz how much he loved the Bel Air hardtop—for the next quarter-century. His uncle used the Bel Air for going to church (Aunt Melva didn't drive), Saturday hunts for groceries at the A&P, maybe about 2,500 miles a year. He worked, coincidentally, at a Baltimore factory that produced piston rings with Chevrolet as its biggest customer. Philosophically, that gave him another reason to buy the Bowtie brand.

Uncle Fritz, sadly, passed on about a dozen years before Bill could buy the Bel Air. It sat on his property immobile ever since then, because again, his wife did not drive. She decided to keep the car in her life for sentimental reasons. Before he died, when the whole gang clambered out at Uncle Fritz's house for the monthly picnics, it became great sport to rush over to the barn and see how many miles had been added to the odometer. That all stopped at Fritz's passing, but this may have been the most physically appealing car in Maryland to have spent so many years parked: By Bill's memory, his uncle was fanatical about polishing the car and keeping the chrome buffed. Cosmetically, the car was still acceptably good, and then some.

*"It drives like a new car, but gets more attention than a Lamborghini. People will cross the street to get a close look at her."*

Bill nonetheless had the brake master cylinder and all of the wheel cylinders bored and sleeved at White Post Restorations in Virginia, and he's never had a fault with the brakes since. Now living in Stuart, Florida, the Bel Air barely burbles when it's rolling along, especially when the lever-operated overdrive smoothly engages at 30 MPH. He keeps it spiffed with Meguiar's care products and feeds it a happily accepted steady diet of 93-octane unleaded. To keep the valvetrain happy, Bill uses a 10W-40 racing oil with a big dose of zinc dithiophosphate. He did resist the urge to mount radial tires, saying the reproduction bias-ply whitewalls just seem a better fit with its leisurely manual steering.

"It drives like a new car, but gets more attention than a Lamborghini. I always thought I would 100 percent restore her, but everybody encouraged me to preserve it, keep it 100 percent original," Bill says proudly. "I've loved this car since I first saw it new in 1956. She makes me feel so young every time I take her for a spin. I'm loving the spin I'm in. She has real magic in her."

The Bel Air matches this 1950s-era house in Miami, which was built for the car owner's grandparents.

# Miami Pearl

## *Four doors take nothing from the classic charm of the 1957 Chevrolet Bel Air sedan*

**BY MARK J. McCOURT** • PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD LENTINELLO

Quiz time: Name the first 1950s American car that comes to mind. Might it be the one that has such overwhelming resonance in our popular culture, that mentioning the late 1950s calls it up for most of us instinctively? Chevrolet's 1957 Bel Air holds that cultural significance for many Americans, even those with no interest in cars. Surprisingly, the best-selling version of that popular model wasn't the convertible or hardtop you'd probably think, the versions we see most often today—but the roomy and attractive four-door post sedan.

The continuing popularity of the '57 Chevy isn't confined to those old enough to remember it when it was new. Miami, Florida, resident Ben Harris wasn't even born when his 1957 Bel Air sedan was built, and yet, he bought it before he turned 30. This landmark car had made an indelible impression on Ben when he was still younger. "I've always liked old stuff. Growing up, my grandparents had 1960s and 1970s Chevys, but I loved the '57 model—it's the one I always wanted to have," he reminisces.

"Back when I was in junior high, I was always doodling the tailfins of 1957 Chevys in my notebooks and on papers—they looked like backwards '7's. One time, in the middle of taking a test, I was doodling those fins on the edges of the paper. The teacher saw this, grabbed my paper and told me to go wait in the hall until class ended. I didn't understand what happened, so I waited


**The 283-cu.in. Turbo-Fire V-8 is mated to a Powerglide, and its 185hp easily runs this car's factory-optional air conditioning.**

until class finished, and went back in," Ben recalls. "The teacher said she always saw me making those marks, and that I must be cheating, using some kind of code. I explained that I was doodling tailfins, and the 1957 Chevrolet was my favorite car. She was old enough to remember them, and she laughed, and gave me back the test to finish."

The demure tailfins that Chevrolet stylists gave their family of models that year—the One-Fifty, Two-Ten and Bel Air, in all their myriad body styles—were one of many visual alterations that set that year's cars apart from the related-under-the-skin models of the previous two years. Indeed, they helped the newest of the "Tri-Five" cars appear, in the late 1950s General Motors idiom, longer, lower and wider. Numerous available V-8s meant the 1957 Chevrolet could be optioned to be significantly stronger than its predecessors, but a modern-day level of power was only one of this car's ahead-of-its-time conveniences.

"I'd always wanted an antique car. My dad told me that I needed a Ford Model A, maybe something that I could crank up to start. I didn't want something that old," Ben admits. "I don't drive stick… I told him I wanted a nice automatic car with power steering and air conditioning, but Dad said that didn't exist." Ben's father had painted the collector car market with broad strokes, his son would learn, as that adolescent favorite with the "backward-7" fins could indeed tick all of the young man's boxes.

Six months after joining a local antique car club, Ben met a man less than a decade older than himself, who drove a black-and-gold 1957 Bel Air sedan every day. In fact, he'd recently driven it to Florida from his previous residence in Arizona; before that, he'd strapped mountain bicycles to a rack on the sedan's roof and used the car's ample V-8 power and reasonable ground clearance to access high-altitude riding trails in Colorado, where the man purchased the car about a year prior from its second owner.

"I'd just met the guy. I was asking questions and going on about his car, and he tossed me the keys. I couldn't believe it! I got in and turned on the radio, and after the tubes warmed up, an AM oldies station came on. The first three songs I heard were by Elvis, Buddy Holly and Ricky Nelson, and right then, I was falling in love with the car and the experience."

Ben made fast friends with the owner of that Bel Air, which was an unusual example of what had been an incredibly popular car when it was new. Indeed, the Bel Air sedan was the second-best selling car in Chevrolet's 1957 lineup, after the mid-line Two-Ten sedan. Its poorly-applied paint was far from original, as the 94,000-mile car had left the factory in two-tone Imperial Ivory over Dusk Pearl, a combination illustrated in the showroom brochure on the pillarless hardtop Bel Air sport sedan. It was fitted with a wide range of options and accessories, including the automatic and air conditioning Ben dreamed of.

Powering the accommodating four-door was the new-for-1957 Turbo-Fire 283-cu.in. V-8, which had been rebuilt at around 85,000 miles. This featured a 3.875 x 3-inch bore and stroke, 8.5:1 compression ratio and a single two-barrel carburetor, and made

**Despite forgoing the optional power assist for the brakes, this 1957 Chevrolet was built with electric wipers and windshield washer.**


**An original service station sticker shows that the car's under-hood components were well maintained from its earliest days.**

**1957 Chevrolets received a sporty and ergonomic new instrument panel. Note the circular A/C vents and accessory tissue dispenser.**

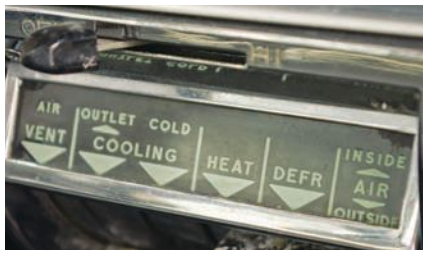
185hp at 4,600 RPM and 275-lb.ft. of torque at 2,400 RPM. The aforementioned automatic transmission was the column-shifted two-speed Powerglide, which had added $188 to the car's $2,390 price, and the factory-fitted air conditioning—a rare and expensive option at $425, or more than $3,600 in 2016 dollars—helped push the sticker of this upscale family four-door well over $3,000.

"I started asking him if he'd consider selling me the car, just about every two days!" Ben says with a laugh. "He soon told me that he hated his job in Miami, and was going to try for a job in Canada. He would go up there for a trial period of three weeks, and would I watch the Chevy for him, since I had a garage and was very conscientious about it?" Again, Ben couldn't believe his good fortune—and his new friend would end up leaving the car in his care for three months.

That extended period gave him a chance to learn how it would feel to own such a classic car. "I welcomed the four doors—I could take a bunch of friends out to dinner, and everybody was very comfortable. Something happened, though, while he was away—the ignition switch shorted out. It cost $40 to buy one from Eckler's Classic Chevy, and there were two wires to connect—it was very easy for me to work on," Ben recalls. "Around that same time, my brother's new 1989 Toyota had a similar problem, but it took two weeks to get that part, and with installation, his bill from the dealer was $600—that was an eye-opener!"

The Bel Air owner eventually got the job in Canada, and decided to sell Ben the sedan, asking for exactly the amount he had put into it: $8,800. "I went to the bank to get the money that very day," Ben says with a grin. "When I bought the car, the people in my car club said, 'Oh, you got a donor car!' They considered sedans and station wagons donors because nobody wanted those body styles, but they'd want parts from them like the air conditioning, the dashboard with the A/C vents, and the power front seat. When the cars were new, you'd often see four-door sedans and wagons, but the two-door models that people collect now were unusual."

When this '57 Bel Air was truly his, Ben chose to restore it





**Among the options fitted to this four-door were a column-shifted Powerglide automatic transmission, push-button AM radio and factory air conditioning, which cost the equivalent of $3,602 in 2016 dollars. The interior was restored with correct reproduction fabrics, vinyl and carpets.**

to factory condition, sparing the unusually equipped car from an ignominious parts-donor fate. Indeed, the air conditioning and power front bench seat weren't its only desirable bits—it was built with power steering (but oddly, not power brakes!) and full tinted glass, and its accessories included the Vacu-Matic cigarette ash receiver, No-Glare day/night rear view mirror, seat belts, under-dash tissue dispenser, traffic light viewer, under-hood lamp, reversing lamps, front bumper guards, rubber bumper bullets and more.

The original Colorado car had no rust, and had never been in a serious accident. The only damage he found was a scrape on the aluminum passenger-side rear quarter trim, and that was explained when Ben made contact with the son of the original purchaser, who'd been a 65-year-old woman named Rose. "He asked me if the car had any damage, and I mentioned the scrape… and the guy started to cry. He told me his mother had done that when she was backing out of the garage in 1959, and they never had it repaired. She'd chosen the paint color because it was like her name."

Ben worked with a Miami man who specialized in painting high-end cars, to return the Bel Air to its original state. "It was a bit difficult getting the color formulas for the paint back then, but we did it. He put three coats of color, and six coats of clear, and I worked with him, wet-sanding between coats. He did such a beautiful job, I've never had to wax the car—it just glows. The colors are very unusual and great for Miami Beach, with the pastel colors of the Deco hotels.

"I sourced new gaskets, and had to replace one bent wheel," he remembers. "I got correct silver-and-black replacement upholstery, plus carpeting, interior panels and seatbelts from Classic Chevy—it cost about $1,000 for everything, a lot of money 25 years ago—and that was installed by a shop about three blocks from my house. They specialized in interior work, and had been around so long, they did an interior for my father back in the 1960s!" The cosmetic restoration of this well-traveled car took about six months.

*"It's very comfortable, in front and back, like sitting on sofas. And you can feel the car's power. It's a lot of fun to drive, especially with all the gadgets."*

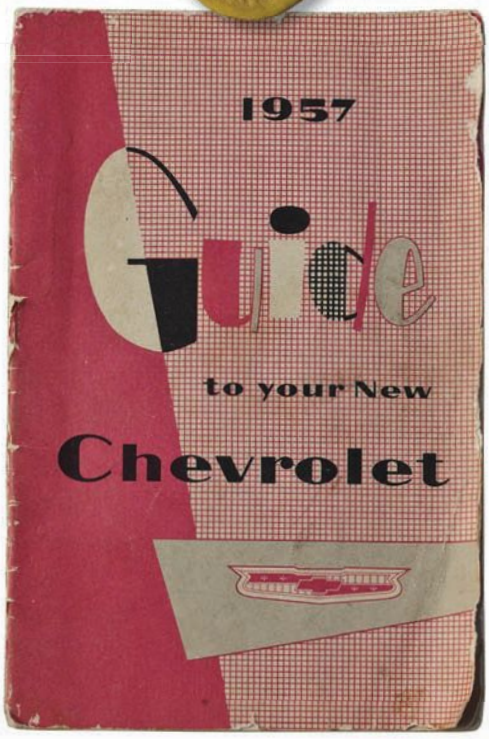
The Bel Air is no longer a daily driver, long since transitioned to Sunday-ride and award-winning show car duty, and it's even participated in photo shoots, like its star turn with a *Baywatch* actress in the pages of *Men's Health* magazine. But it still receives annual oil and coolant changes, and remains a blast to cruise in. "It's a big, powerful car that really drinks gasoline, to the tune of 15 MPG.

"It's like driving a tank," Ben continues. "You get in, close the door and 'thunk,' it's a solid sound. You feel well-protected—I don't feel as safe in my little modern car as I do in here. It's very comfortable, in front and back, like sitting on sofas. And you can feel the car's power. It's a lot of fun to drive, especially with all the gadgets."

It's not surprising, considering this car's 1950s style and color scheme, it's a car his family and friends love to ride in, and that it gets tons of positive attention. "I've had people stop me to ask about the paint, telling me it's gorgeous. I get so many comments—it's an iconic car," Ben says with a smile. "I always wanted to own *the* classic Wurlitzer jukebox, *the* classic 1930s radio, *the* classic Philco television… and I'm lucky enough to have *the* classic car—the '57 Chevy."

# Go-Go Giveaways

*Rarely seen Chevrolet promotional items created to help sell the 1957 models*


**Clockwise from left: Guide Books weren't true promotional items, but they were created to generate interest in new models.**

**In 1957, a large percentage of the population were smokers, so matchbooks were an ideal way to advertise a product.**

**Anything was fair game for an imprint, including a brown paper bag.**

**Quilted pot holders were printed with the tagline "Sweet, Smooth and Sassy!"**

**Flying kites was a popular pastime back in the '50s and '60s, but why spend 75 cents to buy one when you could get a free kite from your local Chevrolet dealer? It was made by Hi-Flier, the premier kite manufacturer of the day.**

**WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD LENTINELLO**

Back in the day, if you walked into any automobile showroom, you were bound to walk out with free stuff. While the plastic promo models were what every kid wanted, there were many other kinds of promotional giveaways; from paper kites and matchbooks to perfume bottles, each sporting the year of the cars that the manufacturers were promoting. Although most of the promo models were collected and saved, all the other giveaways were readily discarded, treated as useless nothings. Oddly enough, these "throwaway gifts" are now the items that collectors search for.

Ben Harris, the owner of the Dusk Pearl 1957 Chevrolet Bel Air shown on the preceding pages, has been on a mission to find every promotional item that the Chevrolet dealers gave away in order to promote cars like his Bel Air sedan. Thus far, Ben has located dozens and dozens of promotional giveaways, and kindly allowed us to photograph several of them.


**Clockwise from above:**
**What better way to convince the woman of the household that the new 1957 Chevrolet was the ideal car to buy than with perfume from Prince Matchabelli? The back side of the tag read: "In appreciation of your interest in the 1957 Chevrolet." This glass perfume gift was given away by Kirby's Garage in Conover, Ohio.**

**This "Super Service" 45 RPM record talks about the cars and the great service you'll get at your Chevrolet dealer.**

**Paddle ball: One solution to keeping the kids occupied while their parents looked over the new 1957 Chevrolets in the showroom.**

**Wooden tokens were common well before the AACA gave them away at its annual Fall Meet in Hershey, Pennsylvania.**

**Bibs kept your toddler's shirts free of Spam and Ovaltine stains.**

**Molded plastic utensils and imprinted napkins and plates accompanied cake and other goodies in some dealers' showrooms.**

**When your new car was delivered or serviced, paper floor mats prevented carpets from getting dirty.**

**KUDOS TO *HCC* #141 AND #135,** and Doug Ashby's letter in Recaps in *HCC* #140, for printing what we all know and hate—that today's car shows are more fiction than fact. I'd love to see what some of those 14-day wonders look like a year later. I bet most of them needed substantial repairs and reworks. The only show with guts enough to do so is *Wheeler Dealers*.

I agree with Mr. Ashby that *Wheeler Dealers* is the best of the bunch. It's a sad state of affairs when the best car show doesn't even come from the U.S. I'm tired of all the false personalities, fake squabbling and ridiculous time frames.

Give us a show with substance and honesty; I bet there's a huge audience of car guys that will tune in.

Ken Stubert
*Georgetown, Texas*

**AFTER BEING RETIRED FOR TWO** years with two hobby cars from the 1960s, I've been aware that I am not very quick with restorations, especially when I watch various TV "wonder mechanics."

In fact, I've been feeling that there was something wrong with me after watching those guys on TV crank out the cars in assembly-line fashion. Thank you, Richard, for helping me restore my own sense of confidence and enjoyment in the hobby with your very realistic auto restoration report that appeared in *HCC* #141.

Jim deBarrios
*Santa Cruz, California*

**I JUST FINISHED READING RICHARD'S** column on scripted old-car shows and must say that I agree 100 percent with everything he wrote, but I could suggest we look at this from another angle. To the uninitiated weekend warrior, his comments hit the target dead center. I'm currently restoring a 1972 El Camino, and cannot tell you how many times I've been asked if it's "done yet," only to respond that restorations take time to do correctly, and mine is coming along on schedule.

I personally watch many of the shows he may have alluded to, but strictly for the purpose of entertainment, and not much else. I would say that like-minded individuals like myself, who have had some form of wrench in their hand since birth, would fit in the "just for entertainment" category, and then follow up with a good PBS special where they build a home in four days.

As for the group which is most likely the focus of the article, I deal with people on a daily basis, who are aghast that my company charges such an "exorbitant fee" to come and check their multi-dollar piece of equipment, and then wonder why I cannot repair it in 10 minutes. I must then explain that this is a highly technical product, and just to get to the component that needs repair involves multiple steps that take hours. I then end my day by going down to my shop, and redoing something on my project car that I am not quite happy with, and reaffirming that quality takes time and should not be rushed.

Ron Accidio
*Macungie, Pennsylvania*

**I APPLAUD RICHARD'S EDITORIAL** about all those cheesy TV shows that populate cable nowadays; he echoed everything I've thought about them for years. Thought I'd point out a couple of other disservices that go hand in hand with these programs. One is that a lot of them are just thinly veiled infomercials for some parts peddlers trying to hawk their wares. Another is that some of these shows appeal to the charlatan instincts in some people by implying that they can drag some piece of junk home, apply some quick cosmetics, and then flip the thing for big profits. Anyone who's kind of on the fringe of the old car hobby, and contemplating involvement, can be seriously misled by these shows. I'd urge you guys to write an article revealing the truth versus the myths that arise from this televised nonsense.

Mike Racine
*Champlin, Minnesota*

**RICHARD, I ALWAYS READ YOUR** columns first because they are always very interesting and to the point of what the hobby is about. Your paint article in *HCC* #136 was very interesting, as was your recent column on the TV shows for the people that are new to the hobby of restoration. This has to be very confusing along with the drama of the infighting in the shop. I, as you, switch the TV channel or turn it off. The hobby at times does not seem to be the hobby of yesterday with these TV shows.

Larry Hansen
*Norwalk, California*

**I ENJOYED READING THE ARTICLE** on Henry Leland that appeared in *HCC* #141. Let me note a Leland item that may be of interest to your readers. The University of South Carolina has a large and growing video archive, the Moving Image Research Collection (MIRC). MIRC is a division of the USC Library System, and was founded in 1980 by the gift to USC of much of the Movietone News archive. While the archive doesn't have all that much auto-related material, it does have, among other things, a 10-minute movie clip of 88-year old Henry Leland talking about the early history of the American auto industry. The clip is online at: http://mirc.sc.edu/islandora/object/usc%3A2844.

Bill Schmidt
*West Columbia, South Carolina*

**HAVING SOMETHING OF A** "double major" in classic cars and Civil War firearms, I must note that the lack of a Civil War veteran's pin in the lapel of the portrait of Henry M. Leland in *HCC* #141 isn't because "He tried to enlist in the Union Army but was rejected for being too young." Leland was military qualified 18 years of age when that four-year struggle erupted. Rather, Leland's interest in the machinist's craft likely outweighed his enthusiasm to shoot and salute, and his critical occupation at Springfield Armory shielded him from the mid-war draft.

Also, Eli Whitney didn't pioneer interchangeability of firearm parts, though he advanced the ball. That epic achievement was made by John Hall and Simeon North with the M.1819 Hall Breech loading rifle.

Dave Fox
*Hendersonville, North Carolina*

**I JUST FINISHED READING THE** article about the 1964 Riviera in which the owner states how difficult it is to remove old undercoating. I had a similar experience with my dad's 1957 Thunderbird. The first owner didn't like the engine noise he could hear with the hood closed. He had the underside of the hood undercoated more than 40 years before I went through the car. I used a heat gun and a combination of steel and plastic scrapers to slowly remove that old undercoating. It took time and patience but was well worth it as I ended up with a surface that was easily prepped for paint.

Doug Watts
*Sarasota, Florida*

*Continued on page 38*

# A Studebaker Pony Car?

One of the saddest facts of our times is that most of the American independent car companies didn't last to the mid-'60s. If they had, they might have become part of the great phenomenon of that period, the birth of the pony car.

By the dawn of the Sizzling Sixties, the only volume independent producers still building cars were American Motors and Studebaker. That's a pity, because if Nash, Willys, Hudson, Packard, Studebaker and Kaiser-Frazer were still going strong in, say, 1967, we probably would have seen them introduce pony cars. Can you imagine that?

Suppose Kaiser-Frazer were still around in 1967—would it have introduced a competitor to the Ford Mustang and Chevrolet Camaro? I think it would have, probably on a concurrent Henry J chassis. We can only hope that by that point it would have had a V-8 engine to offer.

But would Nash have produced a pony car? I think not. Nash always favored a European slant to things automotive, and my guess is it would have introduced a sports car, like the earlier Nash-Healey, to give the Corvette something to worry about. With the Nash 327-cu.in. V-8 under the hood, it would've been a worthy competitor.

Of course, if Nash were still around in 1967 it might not have needed a pony car if a Rambler-branded model had already debuted. And it might have. AMC's late, lamented 1965-'67 Marlin was developed from a smaller, pony-size car called the Rambler Tarpon. Based on a 1964 Rambler American, the Tarpon is best described as looking very much like a Plymouth Barracuda. When it was displayed as a concept car in early 1964, the Tarpon was a hit, and it could have been put into production not long after the 1964½ Mustang. But AMC's president Roy Abernethy believed that what Americans really wanted was a midsized sporty car.

History proved how wrong he was with that idea! The sad part is, if George Romney had still been in charge at AMC, I'm sure he would have approved the smaller Tarpon version over the Marlin. Then again, if the Tarpon had been introduced instead of the Marlin, we might never have gotten the Javelin or the AMX. They were rushed into production only after the Marlin's failure was an acknowledged fact. So you have to be careful what you wish for.

Assuming that Studebaker, Packard and Clipper were all still viable in 1967, I can certainly envision a Studebaker pony car. Considering Studebaker's hard-won reputation for performance, just imagine how hot that would have been! And I can imagine that Studebaker-Packard, assuming they were still together in 1967, would have spun off a more luxurious version of the Studebaker pony car for the mid-range Clipper line to offer. It makes sense, just as it did for Mustang and Cougar. I think a Studebaker pony and a Clipper pony would have offered considerable competition for share-of-market indeed.

I don't think the Packard Division would have offered a pony car per se; but it may have offered a GT-type car like the 1958 Packard Hawk. That would have been pretty cool.

What about Hudson? With that company's historic racing successes, along with its propensity to build big, heavy cars, I can certainly see the Detroit icon getting into the horsepower race, though not necessarily the pony car market. With Hudson's success in NASCAR, I can imagine them avoiding a head-to-head battle with the big boys in the pony car segment and instead fielding an entry in the muscle car arena, with something similar to today's Dodge Charger. As I write this, I can recall a conversation I had years ago with the man who was in charge of designing the all-new 2006 Dodge Charger. When I asked him why the roof line was so low, and the beltline so high, he told me that while creating the new look he was heavily influenced by the 1954 Hudson Hornet.

And last, we come to Willys. The company had a sports car all set to introduce in 1952. Based on the Woodill Wildfire, it was competent, good-looking and could have been well-priced. But having missed that opportunity—and assuming it was still producing passenger cars in 1967—I think the company would have built a pony car. Its stylists actually toyed with the idea, at least on paper, producing some sporty car sketches.

"If Nash, Willys, Hudson, Packard, Studebaker and Kaiser-Frazer were still going strong in 1967, we probably would have seen them introduce pony cars."

*Continued from page 36*

**REGARDING THE ARTICLE ON THE** Chrysler Airflow back in *HCC* #138, Chrysler did not roll the Airflow off a cliff as just a publicity stunt.

Back in the 1970s I read that General Motors had run an ad campaign to discredit the all-steel body Airflow. GM was afraid of the improved technology and that it might negatively affect their sales. So they ran ads that demonstrated how easily a thin-walled metal tube could be bent by hand. Then they inserted a wooden dowel into a similar tube which made the tube nearly impossible to bend.

Now, analytical minds would know that was not an objective demonstration, but GM was still using wood in their vehicle bodies and did not want to appear behind the times, and by consequence lose any sales.

Chrysler's response to GM's dirty trick was to roll the Airflow off a cliff to prove its strength. Who knows if GM's "trick" had any effect on the Airflow sales. Might have, but economic times being what they were, the Airflows, being the most technologically advanced cars on the market, were probably doomed. What a loss.

Kim Hudson
*Norris, Montana*

**THIS IS IN REFERENCE TO BOB** Palma's column, "Flites, Glides and Matics" in *HCC* #141. He mentioned that there were some derisive nicknames given to some of the transmissions, and I remember three of them. We used to call the Power Glide the "Power Slide," the Dynaflow the "Dynaflush," and the Fluid Drive and HydraMatic the "Klunkomatic." I'm sure there are others as well.

I had a 1958 Hillman Estate Wagon (not the Husky) in the early 1960s that had an interesting transmission arrangement. It had the standard four-speed floor shift, but it had an electric clutch. No clutch pedal but a button on the left side of the shift lever that you depressed with your thumb. It worked very well, and it even automatically revved up the engine to the proper RPM if you down-shifted. It did not give me an iota of trouble in the three years that I owned it.

As an aside, I'm also an airplane enthusiast. I got to thinking the other day that there are a lot of car models that have the same names as airplanes, so I compiled a list of some 40 such names; a little more research would probably find more.

Bob Valeski
*Huntington Beach, California*

**JIM'S COLUMN IN *HCC* #141 ABOUT** his father's tool box brought up a real memory for me, too. My dad was a machine operator at International Harvester in Milwaukee during the war, from about the late 1930s to 1946 when he went into management. I have the handmade tool box that carried all the tools he needed for on the job and then home-mechanic use after. There wasn't much money, so he made his own tool box, which was passed down to me after he died in 1962 and it has been in use to this day.

I have more modern tool boxes, but I would never part with this one because it is the most important one of them all to me. And yes, it still has that smell of machine oil to this day. I grew up with that box and its odor. It was handmade back during the war and some of the soldered seams are cracking, and it's not too pretty, but there are so many memories attached to it from working on cars with my dad that I could never let it go. I will leave it when I'm gone and hope my son will keep it for old-time sake, too; it's a family heirloom. I'm 77 years old now, and I remember using it back in the 1940s.

Tom Ziem
*Laguna Hills, California*

**I ENJOYED THE RECENT ARTICLE ON** the Moon that appeared in *HCC* #138. I've always liked cars, but this article and the letters about them reminded me that it was a Moon car (among others) that took me from seeing old cars as merely being old, to being something to be celebrated.

It was at the Port Moody, BC, May Day parade in 1965. After the parade was done, there were three old cars from the parade parked in front of the post office: an Essex, the Moon (maybe even the one pictured with Babe Ruth?, since Port Moody is a Vancouver suburb), and a KisselKar. I'd never heard of any of them before, and had to ask my dad about them when I got home. But they were in the parade, and so they'd become special, and not just something that someone had because they couldn't do better.

Wayne Janzen
*New Westminster, BC*
*Canada*

**THE 1981 PONTIAC FIREBIRD ESPRIT** featured in *HCC* #141 is one of my favorite versions of General Motor's F-body. For most of the '80s decade I owned a fully optioned Atlantis Blue 1979 Trans Am. As much as I liked my T/A's looks, I have always admired the clean lines of the less flashy versions of the 1979-'81 Firebirds, unencumbered by scoops, spoilers, flares, and bird decal. Mr. Dige's Esprit is a great-looking car that combines sporty styling with the durability and economy of the Buick V-6.

Thank you for publishing articles such as this, which proves that six-cylinder cars can be cool.

Randy Stone
*Thurmont, Maryland*

**IN *HCC* #141, READER GLENN** Walker commented on a six-way manually adjustable front seat for 1955 Pontiacs. In 1970, I bought out a Buick and Pontiac dealer's obsolete parts inventory that included one of these special seat frames, still in its very large carton. It apparently was available as a dealer-installed accessory, which replaced the standard frame, and it may also have been a factory-installed option.

This accessory is shown in the 1955 Pontiac color catalog as well as in the 1954 accessories brochure. Whether Pontiac offered it in other years, I do not know.

Allen Walrath
*Amsterdam, New York*

**REGARDING THE "WALLS OF COLOR"** article in *HCC* #139, Portawalls were fairly common around 1955. I had pink Portawalls on my 1950 Chevrolet back in 1955. You didn't glue them on. You deflated the tire on the rim and placed the flange of the Portawall under the rim and reinflated the tire. They came in a variety of colors.

Del Schwab
*Payne, Ohio*

**I ENJOYED THE ARTICLE ON WINTON** in *HCC* #140 very much. Are you aware of the high-rise condo in Lakewood, Ohio, bearing his name? Winton Place. On the property is also a very nice restaurant, Pier W. There is also a street named in his honor in Lakewood. The Templar automobile was also manufactured in Lakewood, and there is a small museum housing a few of the cars.

Alan Roth
*Cleveland, Ohio*

***EDITOR'S NOTE: When writing to Recaps, please include the name of the town/city and state you live in. Thank you.***

# Turn the Paige

You know I'm a fan of the automobiles of America's great heartland state, Iowa. Iowa is where the Duesenberg brothers, Fred and Augie, first got into the business of building cars. The car they constructed first was called the Mason, and while I don't know specifically if it was named for practitioners of Freemasonry, I am certain that it was first built in Waterloo, then in Des Moines, and came to the attention of Fred Maytag. Yes, *that* Maytag, whose company built washing machines in Newton. The Duesenbergs' car became known then as the Maytag-Mason, and then just the Maytag. Today, the Maytag family produces wonderful blue cheese that you can find in your supermarket's specialty deli section. Great, great stuff.

My point is that I really enjoy automotive history as the Hawkeye State's produced it for so many decades. So I was delighted to check the Editorial department's mail cubby and find something from Wayne Lee Schrunk of Salem, Oregon, who had sent along a package detailing some of the exploits of his uncle, Wes Schrunk, who was a pioneering Iowa race driver. Wes Schrunk was a hired gun of the first order, having been a factory driver for Paige. Wayne told us he was prompted to get in touch after reading our recent feature on a 1917 Paige Brooklands in *HCC* #140.

Wes started his racing career around 1911 in Sioux City, Iowa, which had an outsized enthusiasm for motorsports that outstripped its population of around 50,000. As Wayne put it, the pitch-black soil around Sioux City was good for two things, raising bumper crops of corn and enduring the ripping of tires on racing automobiles. His first race was in a production-based Paige-Detroit, and based on that performance, he was given a shot at wheeling a smaller, pure racing Paige. Wayne said his uncle was a highly respected "mechanician," and that, coupled with his driving talent, was what likely made the difference. That was enough to earn him a win in a 10-mile heat at Des Moines in 1915 during his first outing in the car, edging a REO piloted by Walter Guehm, before a fatal accident caused the cancellation of the rest of the day's program.


C. W. Schrunk Oct 21 1911

**Paige-Detroit Wins at the Sioux City Races**

The PAIGE car won first in all events for its class both days, winning the Chicago House cup in the 10-mile event Saturday for cars under 230 cubic inches piston displacement.

Also won second in the 25-mile free for all on Friday, defeated only by a specially built factory racing car of considerable higher price and horsepower.

The PAIGE was the most consistent running car in the meet, running every race and every lap just alike.

I have the full line of PAIGE cars ready for delivery.

PRICES FROM $800 TO $1,100.

**H. A. WETMORE**

THIRD AND PIERCE STREETS

Wes Schrunk went on to become a factory driver for White, Moon and other makes long gone. Wayne estimated his driving career lasted about 10 years, until two drivers he was competing against were killed in a race at the Iowa State Fairgrounds in Des Moines. His wife, Alice, gave him an ultimatum to say goodbye to either racing or to her. They had a young son at the time. After hanging up his goggles, Wes worked at various Iowa auto dealerships as a technical troubleshooter, and also demonstrated new cars' capabilities to prospective buyers. These included trick driving, an ideal skill for an ex-racer. On a wet paved street, Wes would snap a car into a controlled slide by manipulating the throttle and the rudimentary brakes. He'd spin the car 180 degrees, bootlegger style, and smartly back it into a space between two parked cars.

Like many men who appreciated powerful machinery, Wes was attracted to railroading. He moved to Oregon and was hired on as an engineer with the Southern Pacific, throttling heavy steam across the grades of the Pacific Northwest. Following World War II, he transitioned to the new adopted diesels, and remained an engineer until he retired in the 1950s.

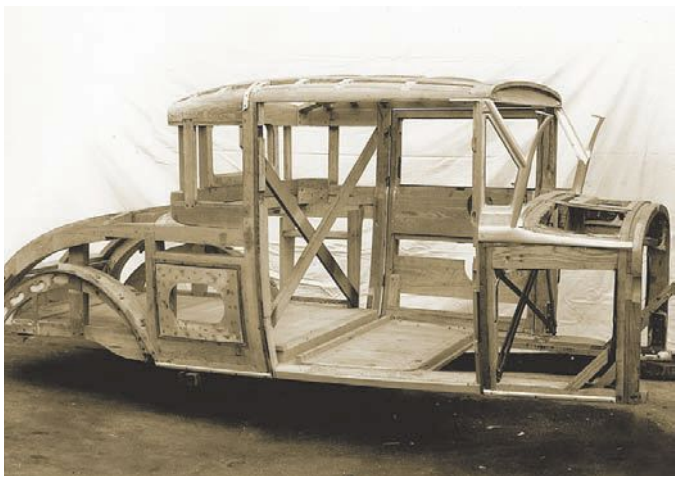
Though long gone now, Wes was a living link to the earliest days of American racing and the rollicking car business that was trying to understand it. He was still in touch with the sport until he passed away in the late 1960s, having remained pen pals with his longtime competitor, Captain Eddie Rickenbacker.

"As Wayne put it, the pitch-black soil around Sioux City was good for two things, raising bumper crops of corn and enduring the ripping of tires on racing automobiles."

# Wood: The Preferred Choice for Classic Bodies

It's inevitable when I display one of my early 1930s Lincolns at an automobile show that is open to the public that I'll get the usual questions: "Where do you buy tires?" "How fast will it go?" "How much is it worth?" And so on.

Sometimes, the conversation gets a little deeper, and we'll start talking about the car's body, specifically, how it was designed and constructed. Most people are surprised to learn that the bodies are framed in wood and covered in aluminum or steel. Sometimes, in fact, I have to show the doubting person an exposed portion of wood, usually at the top of a door.



1930 Lincoln Judkins coupe

Until the 1920s, all car bodies, both production and custom, were framed in wood. Ash was the preferred wood because of its qualities e.g., lightness, quick-curing and easy to saw and shape. However, the production companies switched to other woods—maples, elm and oak—in the early 1920s due to over harvesting of ash.

The custom coachbuilders, whose customers paid more for their cars (including the bodies) continued to use ash. In fact, they preferred second-growth ash because of its longer grain, which meant it held screws tighter.

Ford Motor Company, which owned the Lincoln Motor Company, also owned hundreds of acres of forest in northern Michigan, which included ash trees. In fact, one of the most interesting pieces of Classic automobile sales literature is a large Lincoln brochure circa 1932 entitled *How a Lincoln Body is Made.*

The custom coachbuilders stuck with wood framing long after the automobile industry began its shift toward all-steel bodies. For the high-production manufacturers it was simple economics, but the reality was that all-steel bodies were just as safe.

For the custom coachbuilders, wood was what they knew best. Many of them, such as Brewster, Willoughby, Judkins, Derham and Brunn, began as carriage builders. At the beginning of the 20th Century, they converted their shops to the design and construction of automobile bodies.

Many automotive historians would agree that the golden age of coachbuilding occurred roughly between the mid Teens through the mid 1930s. By the early '30s, it was becoming increasingly difficult for the custom coachbuilders to remain in business.

Sales of the big Classic American and foreign automobiles were in decline, and that was the customer base for the coachbuilders. One automobile company kept the coachbuilders in business: Lincoln, thanks to Edsel Ford's decision to place firm orders for specific body styles. For example, 50 convertible sedan bodies from Dietrich, 30 limousine bodies from Willoughby, and so on.

It wasn't enough. Some companies, such as Packard, cut back extensively on outside coachbuilders. Others acquired a custom coachbuilder as Cadillac did Fleetwood, which then became its in-house coachbuilder. Other custom coachwork customers went out of business as the 1930s progressed, including Stutz, Franklin, Marmon and Pierce-Arrow.

Interestingly, two well-known custom coachbuilders were acquired by production body companies. LeBaron Carrossiers became part of Briggs Manufacturing. When Chrysler Corporation acquired Briggs in 1953 they acquired the right to the LeBaron name, which was used into the 1990s.

Murray Body Company, which had a 50 percent interest in Dietrich, continued to offer the Dietrich nameplate for several years after Ray Dietrich left the company in 1931. Murray closed its doors in the early 1950s.

Thus, only two custom coachwork companies' names survive today—Fleetwood and LeBaron—although it's unlikely today's customers have any idea of the heritage of those once-famous names.

"Until the 1920s, all car bodies, both production and custom, were framed in wood."

# Suburban Simplicity

*Created for the handyman, Plymouth's 1950 P-19 Suburban was the pragmatic car with 101 uses*

**BY DAVE CONWILL** • PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD LENTINELLO

Modern observers often scratch their heads over the utility of a two-door station wagon. Wagons, it seems, are a family vehicle that are best suited for long-distance road trips with Mom, Dad, two kids, Spot and a whole passel of luggage.


And yet few question the purpose of a two-door hatchback. Arguably, the point is the same: A weathertight runabout that seats five and can carry a goodly amount of cargo—more if the back seat is folded down.

It was Willys that pioneered the concept in 1946 with an all-steel, two-door wagon body mounted on its truck chassis and styled like the famous Jeep scout car. Before the war, station wagons were still built from wood and produced with something like taxi service in mind—hence the name "station wagon," a wagon to pick up passengers and luggage from the railroad station.

Plymouth was next with an all-steel wagon, also with two doors, in 1949. Ford and Mercury produced a two-door wagon that year also, but only with the traditional wood bodywork. What could be more appealing to a suburban dad doubling as a weekend handyman or sportsman than a low-cost, easy-to-maintain, simple vehicle that combined the utility of a truck with the convenience of a car?

Plymouth called its new wagon the Suburban, not to be confused with the Chevrolet and GMC Carryall Suburbans, which had been in production since the 1930s but were

**With minimal standard equipment and virtually no options, the interior features a horn button instead of a horn ring, a Mayflower badge instead of a clock and a prominent blank plate in place of the radio and speaker grille.**



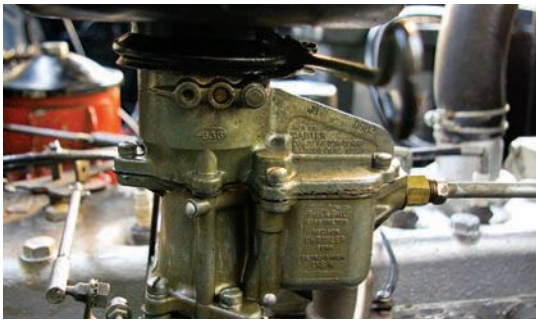

decidedly more truck-like than even the Willys. For 1949, Plymouth offered two wheelbases and two trim lines. The basic trim level was called "De Luxe" and the plusher line "Special De Luxe." The majority of De Luxe-trimmed body styles came on the 111-inch P-19 wheelbase, and most Special De Luxe vehicles rode on the 118½-inch P-20 wheelbase. All featured the same 218-cu.in., 97-hp, L-head straight-six engine and column-shifted manual three-speed transmission.

The Suburban was available trimmed equivalent to both the De Luxe line (shown here) and, beginning in 1950, the Special De Luxe line (but billed simply as "Special Suburban"). Both versions used the P-19 chassis. A traditional, wood-bodied, four-door wagon was available in the Special De Luxe series on the P-20 chassis. This latter wagon was the only one actually called Station Wagon by Plymouth.

Stylistically, the Suburban was directly derived from the rest of the Plymouth passenger-car line, which had left behind pontoon fenders in favor of a blocky, upright restyle for 1949. The 1949 style was streamlined for 1950 with the removal of the more detailed trim elements and redesigned fenders and tail-lamps on the non-wagon bodies. Wagons reused the same rear fenders as 1949, but the body-mounted taillamps were relocated lower compared with their previous placement.

Walking around the exterior, you'll notice that the Suburban is perhaps better characterized by what familiar 1950 Plymouth elements it does not possess: The windshield and window frames are plain, black rubber rather than bright metal. Our feature car still wears the small hubcaps without any trim rings and blackwall bias-ply tires that were standard equipment. The original owner, being cost conscious in the extreme, did not order such optional extras as arm rests, cigar lighters, clocks and chrome gravel shields on the rear fenders—all of which were standard in the Special De Luxe line.

The doors open wide, almost 90-degrees, to expose upholstery that was billed as "lustrous, long-wearing plastic," which Plymouth touted could be cleaned with soap and water. The look, feel and smell are familiar to anyone who has ridden in a vehicle with a vinyl interior built between the 1950s and the



**The flathead six-cylinder was a workhorse, with a basic design dating back to the 1930s, and would remain the base Plymouth engine through 1959. Cowl vents were a somewhat archaic but still very practical feature in 1950. Screen keeps insects out of the interior.**

**Ivory-knob-tipped lever controls the cowl vent. The recirculating heater was the cheapest accessory heater available and was a subsequent addition by the original owner—it may be more effective than the DeLuxe fresh-air heater.**

'80s. The large steering wheel, painted a handsome, contrasting white, features a horn button rather than a ring, and the dashboard is painted body color rather than wood grained as found on pricier Plymouths, convertible excluded.

As you settle into the driver's seat, if you peer over your shoulder, you're stuck by the commodious interior space behind you. With the back seat erect, the Suburban boasts 42 inches of cargo area from the tailgate forward. Lowering the back seat expands the available space to nearly six feet. Special De Luxe Station Wagons, incidentally, offered third-row seating, but required the removal of the center and third rows to make use of their cargo-carrying capability—a marked disadvantage compared to the Suburban, but one in line with its depot-hack origins.

Automatic transmissions and even overdrive were still a few years in the future when this Suburban was built, so like all 1950 Plymouths, this one has a three-speed manual transmission with column controls. Depress the floor-mounted clutch pedal, which is a bit on the stiff side, slip the gear selector into neutral and twist the ignition and the flathead six springs to life. There's no roar, bellow or cam bounce, but the little six-cylinder engine is quiet, smooth and eager to please.

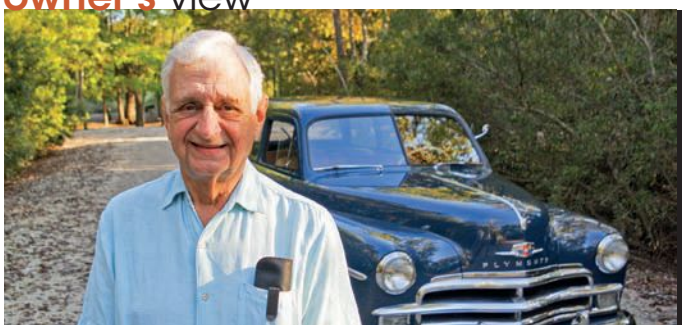
Pull the gear selector back toward you and push it up into reverse and back down the driveway. The Plymouth may be upright and boxy with looks that are something of an acquired taste, but the visibility is excellent thanks to many large windows. It's clear why they were a pragmatic choice when new.

Moving forward, the light flywheel, stiff clutch and equally stiff throttle combine to make starts from a dead stop something more than effortless, but once the Plymouth's particular footwork is mastered, it's nothing that requires a second thought. Acceleration, not surprisingly, is leisurely but adequate. Certainly pulling into traffic was probably easier in 1950 than today.

The drum brakes are up to the task of stopping the wagon and aren't any more prone to fade than the competition. Again, however, modern stop-and-go traffic will likely get tiresome—but isn't it in a modern car, too?

The ride in the Plymouth is very good and would likely even

**When Bob Duncan acquired the Plymouth, its spacious cargo area still held a bag of concrete and a five-gallon bucket of paint—testament to its years of use in servicing the original owner's rental properties. Folding the back seat flat gives six linear feet of space.**



**I've put about 5,000 miles on it since it was restored. It's not a number one car, because I do drive it. When I was a teenager, I saw a 1949 Suburban on a dealer's lot. I looked at it, but I hadn't convinced my mother that I should be able to buy a car yet, so I didn't get it. But I liked the looks of it at that time. These days Suburbans are rare because the tradesmen wore them out! The rareness of them appealed to me—and the fact that I could afford it. It's a quality car. It's fun to drive and it's fun to have.**

be better full of passengers or cargo. Unusually for an American car, Plymouths of this vintage are known to oversteer slightly in extreme cornering, but this shouldn't manifest itself in normal driving that is appropriate to the car's original design.

With 4.10 gears in the differential, intended more to get a heavily-laden car moving rather than high-speed cruising, top speed is limited. The Plymouth is capable of doing 70 MPH, but is really happier with a more period-appropriate 55-60 MPH speed on the open road. One can see how it would have been an ideal vehicle for use in town, checking on and maintaining rental properties, just as its original owner used it.

Retired salesman Bob Duncan, of Charleston, South Carolina, purchased this Brunswick Blue example from the original owner in February 1987. He was aware of the car because it was stored three blocks from his parents' home in Marion, South Carolina. At the time of purchase, the car had been sitting in a garage for eight years with the master cylinder dry, the battery dead and all four tires flat. After six weeks of trying, Bob finally convinced the original owner that he would give the car a good home.

Bob purchased the car with the intent of driving it and eventually giving it a full restoration. He began by refilling the brake system, replacing the battery and tires, and pushing the car for 2½ blocks until it finally began to once again move under its own power. Following the 25-mile drive home, he enjoyed the Plymouth in its original condition until 1996, when restoration finally commenced.

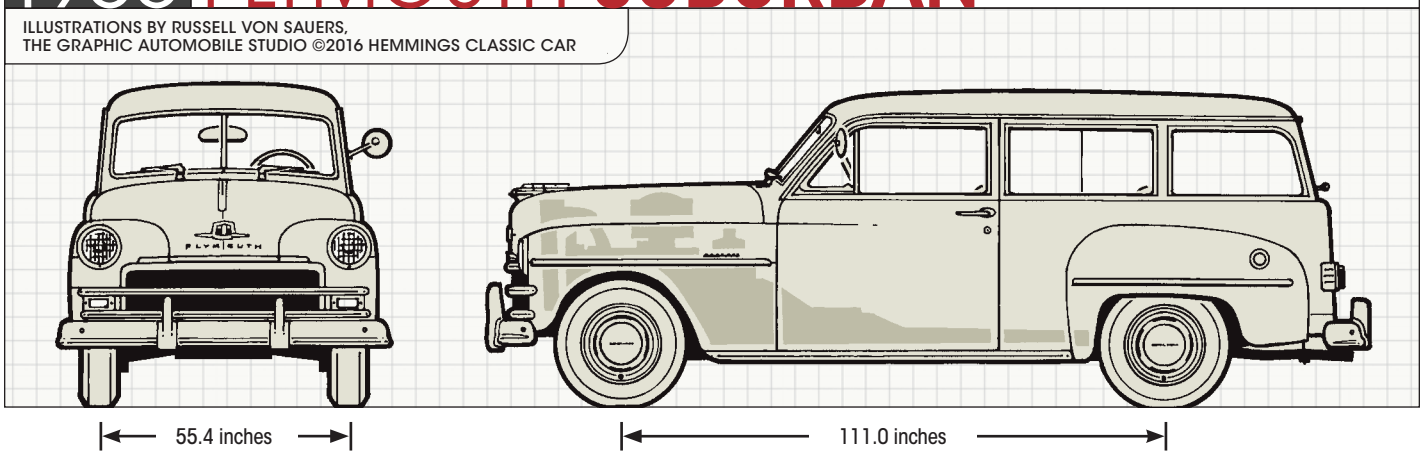
Bob's son, Bruce, began the project for him by replacing the rocker panels and floor pan and treating the Suburban to restored bodywork and new paint. When Bruce moved to Florida, the project went on hiatus again until Bob's retirement. Bob enlisted a friend to assist him in reassembly of the wagon. The second part of the project took 14 weeks, including two weeks in a Greer, South Carolina, upholstery shop.

The downside to restoring such a rare model to complete originality, as Bob says, is that the Plymouth is now "too nice to drive in local traffic." But Bob still manages to put 500 to 1,000 miles on his Suburban each year, trying to give the car four or five miles of exercise every few weeks to keep things in working order.

The original owners unfortunately passed away before they could see "Old Blue," as the family cook had nicknamed the Plymouth, in a fully restored state, but their daughter, who learned how to drive in the car, did. After 29 years, the Suburban has become a part of Bob's family as well, and he calls the car "definitely a keeper." We agree.

# 1950 PLYMOUTH SUBURBAN

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RUSSELL VON SAUERS,
THE GRAPHIC AUTOMOBILE STUDIO ©2016 HEMMINGS CLASSIC CAR




## SPECIFICATIONS

### PRICE

| | |
|---|---|
| BASE PRICE | $1,840 |

### ENGINE

| | |
|---|---|
| TYPE | L-head straight-six; iron block and cylinder head |
| DISPLACEMENT | 217.8 cubic inches |
| BORE X STROKE | 3.25 x 4.375 inches |
| COMPRESSION RATIO | 7:1 |
| HORSEPOWER @ RPM | 97 @ 3,600 |
| TORQUE @ RPM | 175-lb.ft. @ 1,200 |
| VALVETRAIN | Mechanical |
| MAIN BEARINGS | Four |
| FUEL SYSTEM | Carter 06H2 one-barrel carburetor |
| LUBRICATION SYSTEM | Full-pressure, gear-type pump |
| ELECTRICAL SYSTEM | 6-volt, 40-amp generator |
| EXHAUST SYSTEM | Single |

### TRANSMISSION

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| TYPE | MoPar three-speed, column-shifted selective manual transmission with second- and third-gear synchromesh | |
| RATIOS | 1st | 2.57:1 |
| | 2nd | 1.83:1 |
| | 3rd | 1.00:1 |
| | Reverse | 3.48:1 |

### DIFFERENTIAL

| | |
|---|---|
| TYPE | Hypoid, semi-floating axles, open differential |
| RATIO | 4.10:1 |

### STEERING

| | |
|---|---|
| TYPE | Gemmer worm-and-roller |
| TURNS, LOCK-TO-LOCK | 3.5 |
| TURNING CIRCLE | 37 feet, 8 inches |

### BRAKES

| | |
|---|---|
| TYPE | Hydraulic, four-wheel manual drum |
| FRONT | 10-inch iron drum, dual-cylinder |
| REAR | 10-inch iron drum, single-cylinder |

### CHASSIS & BODY

| | |
|---|---|
| CONSTRUCTION | Full-frame |
| BODY STYLE | Two-door, all-metal station wagon |
| LAYOUT | Front engine, rear-wheel drive |

### SUSPENSION

| | |
|---|---|
| FRONT | Independent; coil springs, telescoping shock absorbers, front anti-roll bar |
| REAR | Solid axle; longitudinal leaf springs, telescoping shock absorbers |

### WHEELS & TIRES

| | |
|---|---|
| FRONT | Steel |
| FRONT/REAR | 15 x 4.5 |
| TIRES | Goodyear Super Cushion black-wall, bias-ply (OE) |
| FRONT/REAR | 6.40-15 |

### WEIGHTS & MEASURES

| | |
|---|---|
| WHEELBASE | 111.0 inches |
| OVERALL LENGTH | 186.5 inches |
| OVERALL WIDTH | 73.7 inches |
| OVERALL HEIGHT | 64.5 inches |
| FRONT TRACK | 55.4 inches |
| REAR TRACK | 58.4 inches |
| SHIPPING WEIGHT | 3,116 pounds |

### CAPACITIES

| | |
|---|---|
| CRANKCASE | 5 quarts |
| COOLING SYSTEM | 3.75 gallons |
| FUEL TANK | 17 gallons |

### CALCULATED DATA

| | |
|---|---|
| BHP PER CU.IN. | 0.45 |
| WEIGHT PER BHP | 32.12 pounds |
| WEIGHT PER CU.IN. | 14.31 pounds |

### PRODUCTION

| | |
|---|---|
| SUBURBAN | 34,475 |
| STATION WAGON | 2,057 |

### PERFORMANCE

| | |
|---|---|
| 0-60 MPH | 24.6 seconds |
| TOP SPEED | 85 MPH |
| SOURCE | *Mechanix Illustrated*, April 1950, testing a 1949 Suburban |

## PROS & CONS

+ Spacious interior
+ Good handling and ride
+ Simple to maintain

- Slow acceleration
- Twitchy clutch uptake
- Trim parts hard to find

## WHAT TO PAY

**LOW**
$7,000 – $9,000

**AVERAGE**
$15,000 – $18,000

**HIGH**
$30,000 – $35,000

## CLUB CORNER

**PLYMOUTH OWNERS CLUB**
P.O. Box 416
Cavalier, North Dakota
58220-0416
www.plymouthbulletin.com
Dues: $30
Membership: 3,000

**WPC CLUB**
P.O. Box 3504
Kalamazoo, Michigan
49003-3504
www.chryslerclub.org
Dues: $40
Membership: 8,500


# The First Car

*Forty-six years from its original purchase, this 1969 AMC Javelin SST is back in the family to stay*

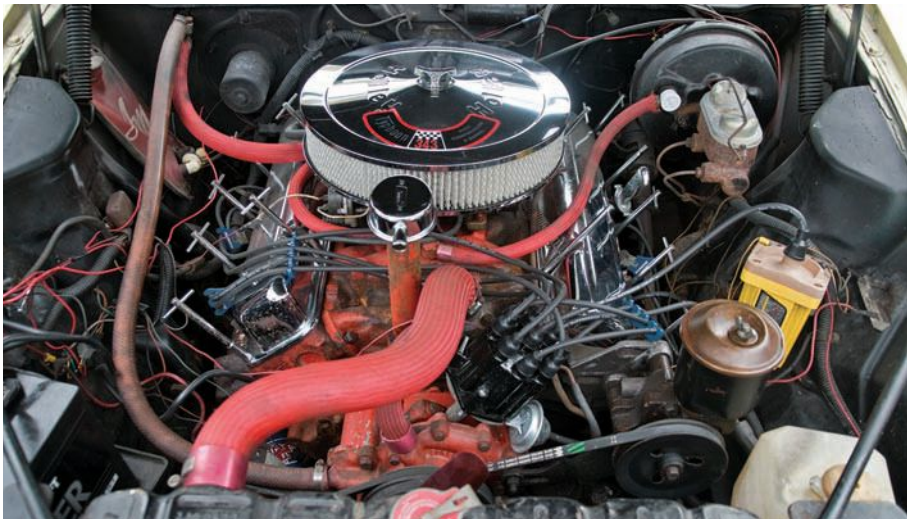
**BY MARK J. McCOURT** • PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIEL STROHL

What do you consider a family heirloom? Do you possess something you treasure, that has been handed down through generations to you, and that you plan to give to your children? It could be something small, like a pocket watch, or large, like a piece of furniture. How about something even larger, something that imbibes gasoline and turns tires into smoke? That's just the kind of heirloom that a 1969 AMC Javelin SST is, one that was passed from a grandfather to his grandsons, and




Antonio Coutinho had recently emigrated from Portugal before he bought this Javelin in 1970; this 1975 photo of him and the car shows its original look, before it was gifted to his grandsons and modified to their tastes.

**A four-barrel Carter AFB carburetor sits atop the Javelin SST's rebuilt 280hp, 343-cu.in. V-8, which to this day has covered fewer than 60,000 miles from new.**



is destined to remain in their family for decades to come.

This American Motors pony car was in the care of Peter Silva when we photographed it, but we learned the Javelin has a much deeper and broader story.


**Ted had the wood-rim Grant GT steering wheel installed when he and Peter drove this car in the early 1990s; the driver's seat vinyl has since been patched. Their grandfather's cigar burn remains by the ashtray.**

This represents the second time Peter has been its primary driver: He's had it in his driveway for the past eight years, but also drove it in the early 1990s, sharing it with his brothers Paul and Ted. The Javelin's tenure in the family dates much further back than that, though, as the Silvas tell us.

"Our grandfather, Antonio Coutinho, who we called "Vovô," bought this car in 1970, when it was a year old," Peter explains. "He'd recently emigrated from Portugal, and brought our family over here. It was kind of a big deal when he got the Javelin—it was his first car. Our mom tells a story about the day he bought it, as she was with him. It came from a dealership in Rhode Island, a couple hours' drive from home in Massachusetts. He was a nervous driver, and actually got pulled over for going too slow, maybe 35 MPH on the highway. Mom had to take over and drive the thing! This is a muscle car that's meant to be driven like you stole it, but he was driving it like a little old lady," he laughs.

"He owned the car for more than 10 years, but didn't drive it much. We had a cousin who would take it out once a year to blow out the carb. He'd say that he broke 100 MPH each time, because the car needed it since it sat most of the year. Our grandfather used to tell our parents that the AMC would go to his first grandchild who drives, and my parents brought that up to my oldest brother Paul when he was about 15, suggesting he remind our grandfather of what he'd said. It had about 17,000 original miles on it when he gave it to Paul in 1983."

The 1969 model represented the Javelin's sophomore year, and with its attractively clean semi-fastback pillarless coupe styling, it remained a discerning choice in the hot Mustang/Camaro/Barracuda/Firebird/Cougar sporty youthful car market. Like the segment-leading Mustang, you could order this "independent" in mild or wild tune, and the Javelin's engines ranged from a single-barrel-carbureted 145hp, 232-cu.in. straight-six to a four-barrel 315hp, 390-cu.in. V-8. Our feature Driveable Dream was built, as the quarter panel callouts proclaim, with a potent mid-range 343-cu.in. V-8.

This four-barrel engine combines a 4.08 x 3.28-inch bore and stroke with generous 10.2-compression to make 280hp at 4,800 RPM and 365-lb.ft. of torque, and it was aligned with a Shift-Command three-speed automatic on the column. Underpinning the AMC were wishbone coil spring front and solid axle leaf spring rear suspensions, along with front disc/rear drum brakes behind 14-inch steel wheels. Javelin SST niceties included a sport steering wheel, reclining vinyl-covered bucket seats and a Weather Eye heater. This example was originally fitted with an optional vinyl roof covering and turbine-look hubcaps.

The Javelin—14 years old in 1983 and then still in original condition—had incredibly low miles, but that didn't stop Paul from making the car his own. "I didn't need to do anything to the engine, but I redid the interior and changed the paint to Ford's Canyon Red, a maroon color. I put Cragars and oversized tires on it—I was a dumb high school kid," Paul tells us with a grin. "It was a muscle car, so I had some fun with it."

When he went off to college a couple of years later, the AMC was left behind at the family's home, parked up on blocks in the back yard. It was around 1990 that younger brothers Ted and Peter got their driver's licenses, and it was time to recommission the car again. They pulled the engine and took it to a specialist to be rebuilt. "The shop installed an oversized cam to give it a bit of a boost," Peter remembers. "When the engine was reinstalled, it fired up the very first time; we couldn't believe it!

"Ted was a senior and I was a junior, and we'd ride to school together, driving it around at lunch and taking our buddies out in it on weekends," he remembers. "We called it 'The Jav.' That car was so classic back in the day, it was *the* cool car. It was always the one we wanted to drive around on a Friday night." But when these brothers went off to college,

the same thing happened—the Javelin ended up on blocks, under a tarp in the backyard. "Our father finally gave us the ultimatum to get rid of it—we received an offer for $800 for the car, and regretfully, we sold it."

And so it seemed that Vovô's Javelin had outlived its usefulness for the Silva grandchildren. But years later, the car still occupied a fond place in their memories. Peter and Paul were sharing recollections about the Javelin when they decided, on a whim, to look up the person who'd bought the car from their family more than a decade prior. "I found his number online, and we decided to call him on the spot, to conference him in," Peter explains. "He answered, and we explained that he'd bought our grandfather's car from us years ago. We were reminiscing about the Javelin, and what ever happened to it? He said, 'It's sitting in my garage!' I asked how it looked, and he said that he'd brought it back to the original Pompeii Yellow, and did a bit of this and that. And it still ran great. He didn't use the car much anymore, and his wife wanted the garage space back. So I said, 'This isn't why we called, but would you be interested in selling it back to us?' He said, 'Absolutely!'"

With Paul then living in Michigan, Ted having other priorities and youngest brother Mark on a tight budget just out of law school, Peter took responsibility for getting the car back into the family, and became its primary owner. He brought it home on a rented U-Haul trailer, and was pleasantly surprised at what he found. "The glovebox still had stuff in it from when we owned it—it wasn't like he'd cleaned it out and made the car his own. It was a sign, almost like he'd been holding it for us for all those years!"

*"That car was so classic back in the day, it was the cool car. It was always the one we wanted to drive around on a Friday night."*


It seemed the seller wasn't only holding the car for the Silvas, but he'd turned back the clock with that repaint and by installing a set of correct, styled steel wheels. Peter tended to some of its basic mechanical needs, replacing the fuel and water pumps, along with the radiator, to make the car fully reliable, and since the photos on these pages were taken, he's patched the seat vinyl and replaced hoses to tidy up the engine bay. "There are some things I've left alone, like a burn hole by the ashtray from one of my grandfather's cigars," he says.

"This car is easy to maintain, it drives really well, and still does great burnouts," Peter admits with a laugh. "We used it in Ted's wedding, and have photos of all four brothers posing with it. It's not going to win any prizes in its current state, although I'm thinking about restoring it when it turns 50 in a few years, almost like a birthday present to the car."

He continues, "The Jav doesn't really take me back to high school; it primarily reminds me of my grandfather and brings up great old stories. That's what it represents—our heritage, how we came to America, and the hard work and entrepreneurial spirit that our grandparents and parents instilled in us. We [brothers] have those first-car memories of this car, along with our grandfather. He didn't get to meet my children, but it's great to have my kids in their great-grandfather's car now. They're eight and four years old, and they love riding in it and asking questions about our history. Now, two generations later, we're still enjoying it like he did. It's not going anywhere this time—it's never leaving the family."

The Phianna cars were built from 1917 through 1922, first in Newark, New Jersey, and then in Long Island City, New York. The original owner of this 1919 example specified these unusual octagonal shaped headlamps be fitted.

# Night Vision

## *The evolution of headlamp design*

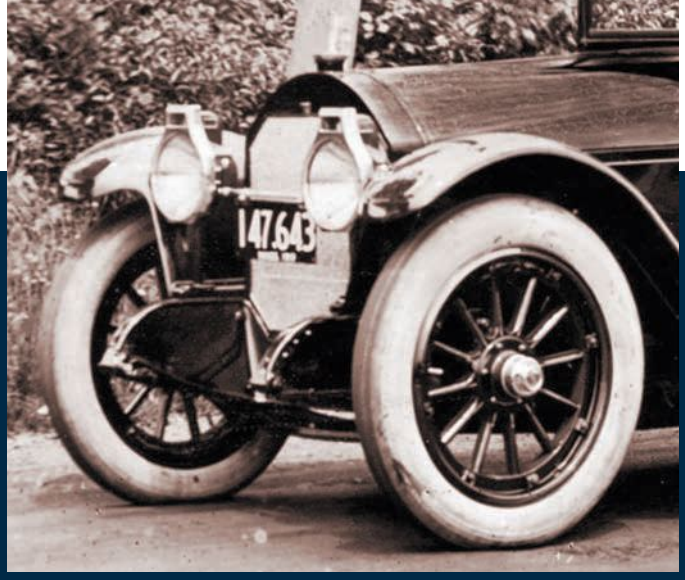
**BY WALT GOSDEN** • ILLUSTRATIONS COURTESY OF THE WALT GOSDEN COLLECTION

The objects of any given era are shaped by the various styling trends that led up to that era. When the motor car first began to become popular, Art Nouveau was in vogue, and its influence on the automobile's appearance is evident. Later, the Art Deco and Streamline Moderne design periods, which lasted up into the 1940s, in turn also left their imprints.

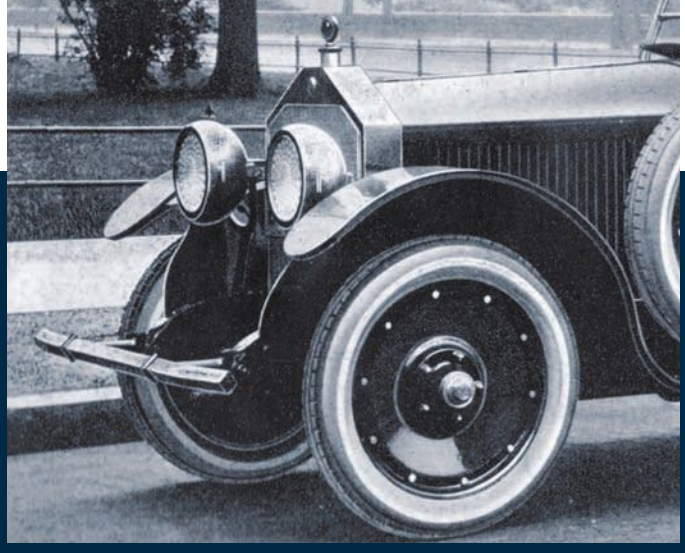
When the carriage evolved into the horseless carriage, the coachwork as well as the lamps that were fitted to it for night travel remained basically the same. Most larger cities at the time were equipped with gas street lamps, as were houses and buildings, for illumination after sunset. Those carriage and early car lamps were primarily fueled by kerosene.

Many of the early cars were diminutive in size, so lamps of appropriate proportions were fitted. As the cars grew larger, so did the lamps, with side and tail lamps still being fueled by kerosene. But headlamps soon were powered by acetylene gas produced by calcium carbide crystals mixed with water in a separate tank mounted at the side of the car. Some elaborate and expensive headlamps were called "self generating" due to the fact that they had a container in the headlamp itself where the crystals and water combination mixed, thus eliminating the separate tank and hoses to connect to the headlights.

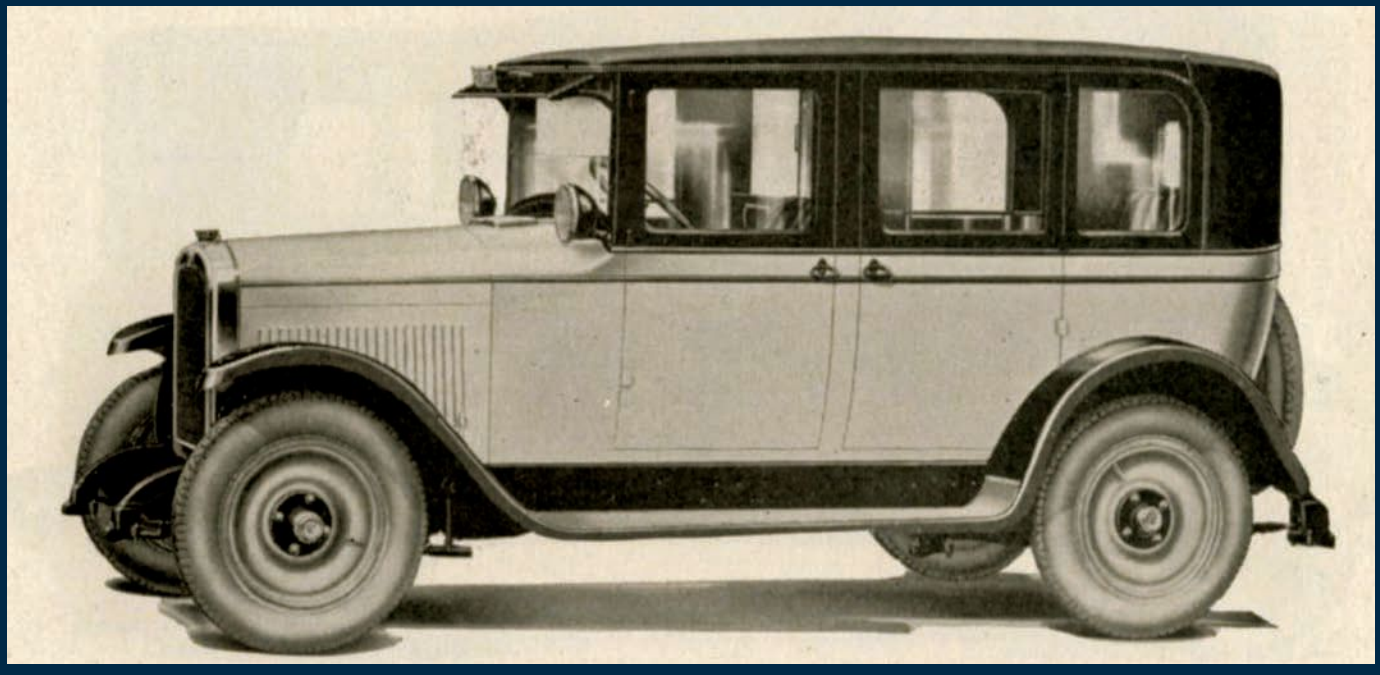
I am not sure if early motorists were thinking of the phrase, "Let there be light" from the third verse of the book of Genesis, but I'm sure many hoped that the headlamp would indeed light on the first try. Too little gas, and the lamp wouldn't light or stay lit; too much gas and hazardous incendiary conditions would exist.



For several years in the late Teens, Locomobile used these distinctively shaped headlamps on both its Model 38 and 48 cars.

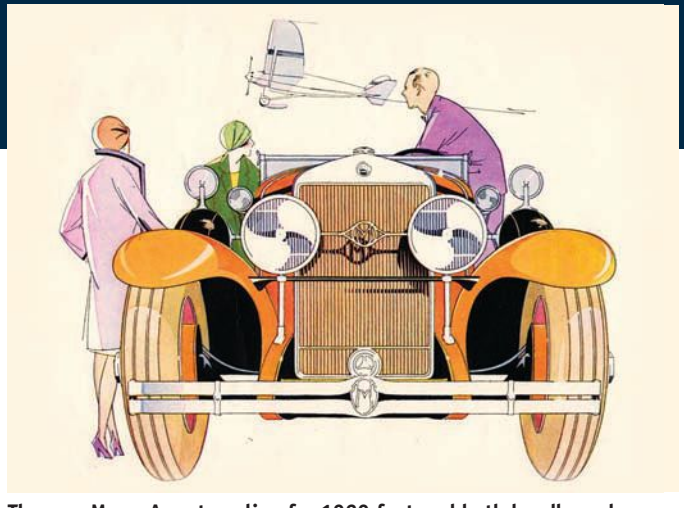


Large plated bowl-shaped headlamps are fitted to this Type 145 McFarlan six-cylinder sport touring that cost $5,600 when new. This style was typical of the design fitted to many cars of the 1920s.

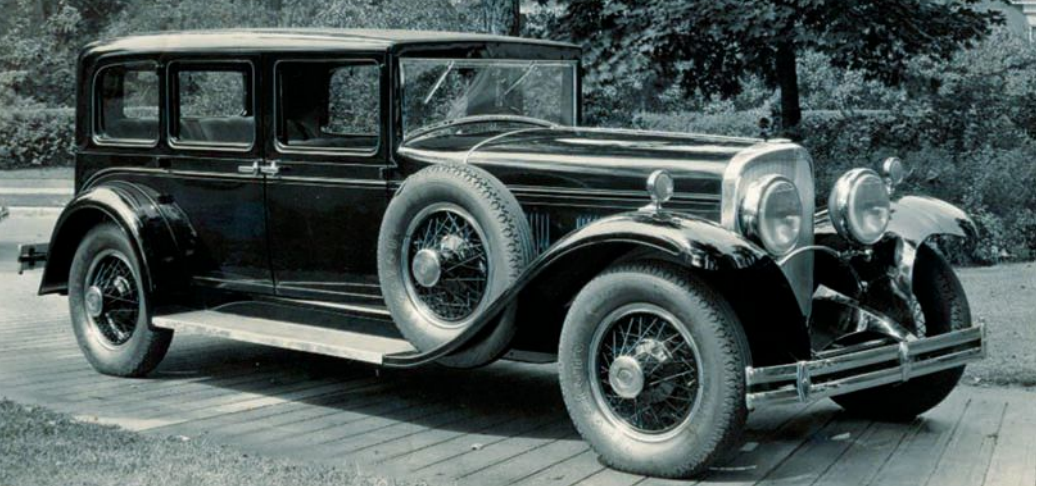


In 1927, many taxicabs used in large cities had their headlamps mounted at the cowl by the windshield for strictly functional use. This is a Yellow taxicab made in Chicago, Illinois.


The wonderful style of the Willys-Knight Great Six of 1929 was carried throughout many of its various elements, including the headlamps and parking lamps, radiator shell and headlamp bar.



The new Moon-Aero type line for 1929 featured both headlamp bar and posts as well as a decorative die-cast bar mounted between the headlamps that had a large "M" emblem at the center. The same "M" design was repeated at the center of the front bumper.

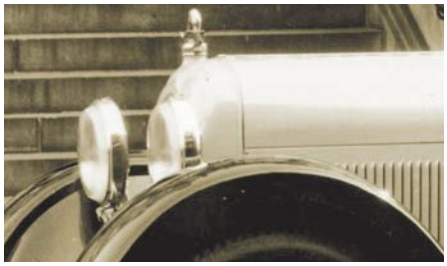


**The large-diameter Ryan headlamps were popular with Kissel, Stutz, Franklin and Duesenberg Model X in the 1928-1929 era. The bulge at the edge of the glass lens was their distinguishing feature. The back of the body of these lights was either flat, giving them a very narrow profile, or a more conventional sphere shape with a raised point at the center. Shown here is a Model 140 Elcar from 1930 fitted with those lamps.**

The styling of the brass headlamps varied from car to car, as there were numerous lamp manufacturers to choose from: Gray & Davis, E & J, Solar, and Rushmore, to name just a few. In addition, lamps from Europe were also popular and available at automobile accessory stores and via mail-order supply catalogs. Cars were personalized with accessory lamps from the earliest days.

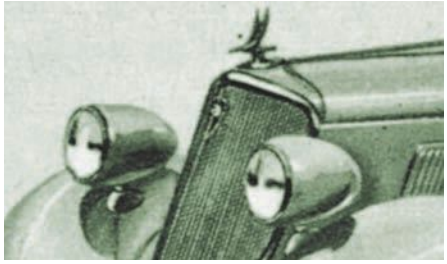
The brass lamps were not just functional; some were unique and quite beautiful, reflecting (no pun intended) the Art Nouveau style of that era. Some of the tops (chimneys) of the fixture were multi-tiered to allow the heat from the flame to escape and resembled tiny pagodas, while others had graceful bail handles. The main bodies of the lamps were cylinders or square in shape. There was a huge variety to choose from, and their designs contributed to the overall appearance of the automobiles they were mounted on.

Moving into the teens, headlamps for the majority of cars became somewhat more alike in style, if not in overall size. Car manufacturers supplied a single taillamp at the rear, a pair of headlamps up front and perhaps some small lamps at the cowl, near the windshield, as well. Most of these electrical units were purchased by the car manufacturers from outside suppliers and not produced in house. Most lamps were simply cylinders oriented lengthwise with flat fronts and backs and resembled a small

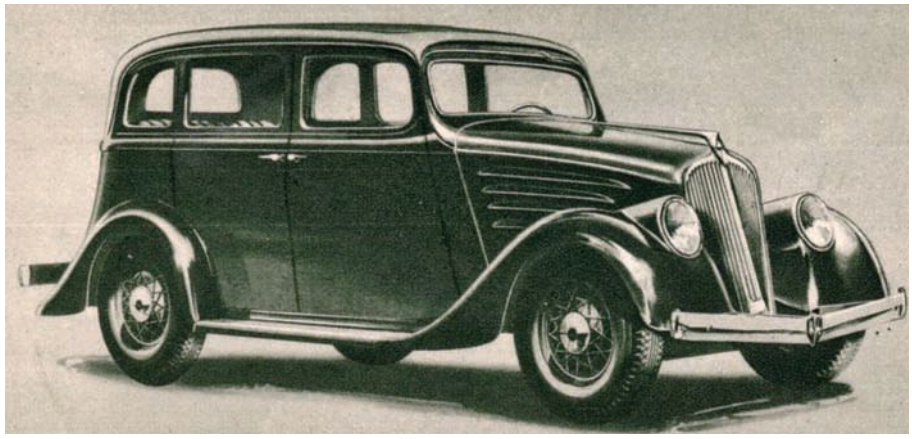


**This Duesenberg Model X of 1927 is fitted with the distinctive pancake-like flat-back style of Ryan lamps.**

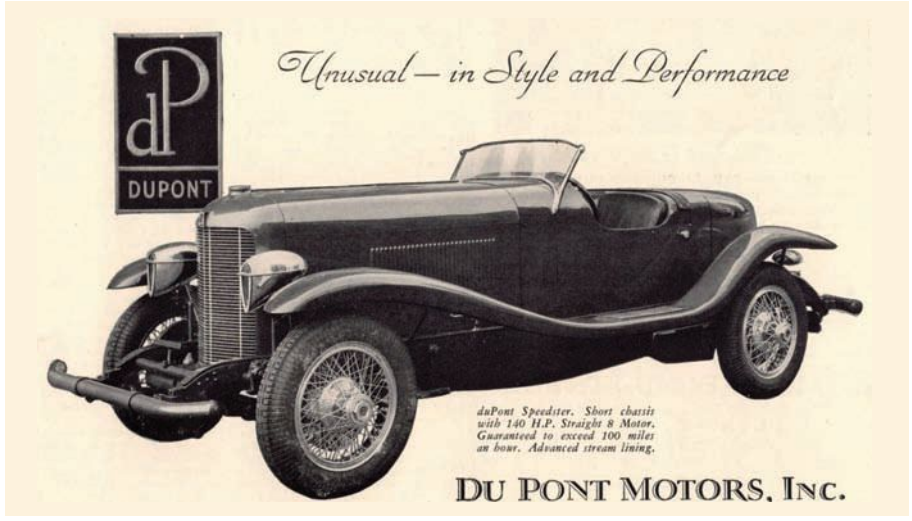
**"That's Streamlining" was the way in 1934 that Chrysler described its new look in the data book issued to its sales staff. The styling of the Airflow, with its headlamps flush with the front of the body, represented a dramatic change.**



**The Studebaker President Regal of 1935 had its elongated headlamps mounted on the inner fender area.**



**Introduced in 1933 was the Willys 77. At the time, *MoToR* magazine declared that the cars showed "new thoughts in body contouring." They did, indeed, as the 1934 version seen here, with front fenders and lamps flowing together as one unit, illustrates.**




**Woodlite headlamps, with their distinctive shape, cannot be mistaken for any other brand. The du Pont speedster body style used them exclusively, as shown here on this example from 1928.**

drum. Most had a plain, painted body with a nickel-plated rim to hold the glass lens in place.

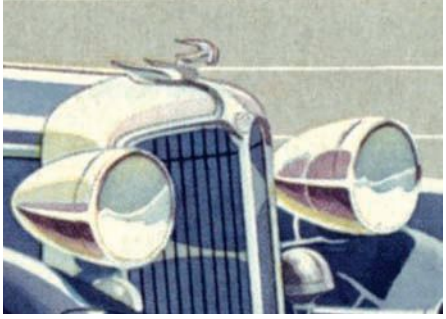
As the horseless carriage era passed, headlamps powered by electricity took the place of gas lights. By the mid-1920s, automobiles began featuring more plated brightwork, a reaction to the styling trend of the late teens that had seen most cars with painted everything: radiator shells, headlamps and taillamps, windshield frames, top irons, bumpers, etc. The decoration on rims of the headlamps also became more elaborate. This subtle upgrade in ornamentation affected the overall appearance and styling of the cars.

The 1924 Buick six-cylinder automobile, for example, had wonderfully decorative nickel-plated headlamp rims alongside its nickel-plated radiator shell, giving the car a more upscale look as compared to its four-cylinder companion car that year.

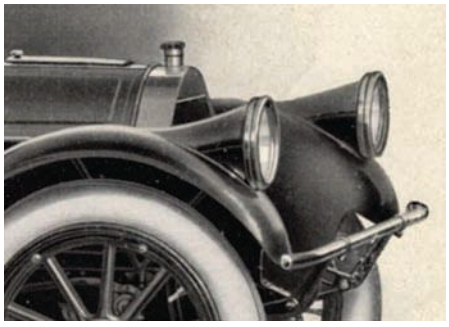
Rims on drum-shaped headlamps did their part to work with the styling of that era. As the 1920s progressed, several car makes saw the headlamp designed to harmonize with the body, hood and fender, or at the very least, mimic the design of the radiator, and become a recognizable signature point of the car. The 1925-'28 Franklin, for example, had a drum-shaped headlamp with a ball-shaped back, and at the top, a rectangular-shaped area projecting back with glass jewel lenses in the sides. Willys Knight was outstanding in its design of the headlamps on its cars, and they complemented the style of the shell/hood area beginning in 1925 with its 66 Series models and continuing up to the new Great Six series of 1930.

Headlamp design combined the ele-

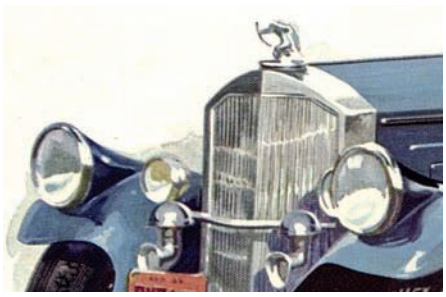
**1934 Packard 12-cylinder cars had dorsal fins running front-to-back along the top of both the headlamps and parking lamps.**



**The 1932 Chrysler Imperial featured a raised horizontal band in the side of the body of its headlamps to convey speed.**



**The Pierce-Arrow model C-3 of 1915-'16 clearly shows that company's signature styling feature of the headlamps rising up like a wave from the front fenders.**



**The Art Deco-styled radiator shell and fenders of the 1933 Pierce-Arrow still use the same location for the headlamps, but the appearance is more refined, less bold and perpendicular than in previous years.**

**Pierce-Arrows that were exported to Europe were fitted with the more conventional headlamps on a bar due to laws that required that small lights had to be mounted on the tops of the front fenders. This is a 1929 Model 143 sedan that was owned by a friend of the author in England in the 1960s.**



**This 1932 Packard Twin Six, with its V-shaped shell, was introduced late in the summer of 1931. The tops of the headlamp rims beautifully echo the shape of the shell. Classic styling at its best.**

**Studebaker in 1932 touted its "distinctive ovaloid headlamps" for contributing to its beauty and "charm of air-curve design."**

**By 1934, bowl-shaped headlamps were out of favor, just like the drum headlamps before them, and most cars were fitted with plated oblong lamps like the ones pictured here on this 1934 Terraplane.**

Hupmobile in 1934 offered cars with two headlamp styles—the conventional bullet-shaped oblong style, mounted on a short post to the fender, and the new streamline aerodynamic style that was fitted with oval lenses and blended back into the hood sides, as seen here in their series 521 of 1935.

"A distinguished old name on a brilliant new car" is how Hupmobile promoted itself in 1938. Its cars had a new body shell design, and although the headlamps still blended into the hood sides, it wasn't as dramatic as it was in the previous four years.

The Lincoln Zephyr made its debut in 1936 and was a stark contrast compared to the big K-Series. Smaller and sleeker, the headlamps flowed into the front fenders at a rakish angle, while the Model K still had its headlamps mounted separately on stands.

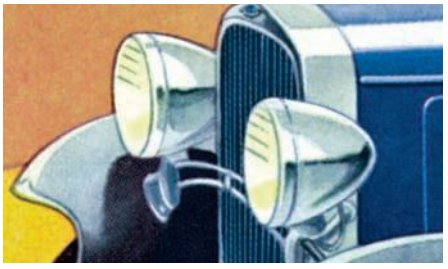
Chrysler did it with its Airflow in 1934, and Graham took a giant streamlined leap in its design for 1938 with its "Spirit of Motion" styling. The rectangular headlamps, with their bold speed-streak styling, was one of the most dramatic concepts that year.

ments of the lamp body, rim, lens pattern and headlamp bar or bracket, as well as the finish, that is, the amount of plated or painted areas. How well did these floating objects of illumination complement the overall image of the car? As the 1920s progressed, it seems the "auto body engineers," as stylists were then titled, had begun considering the impact that these components would have in the overall form of the completed car. The 1930s would be the decade of contours.

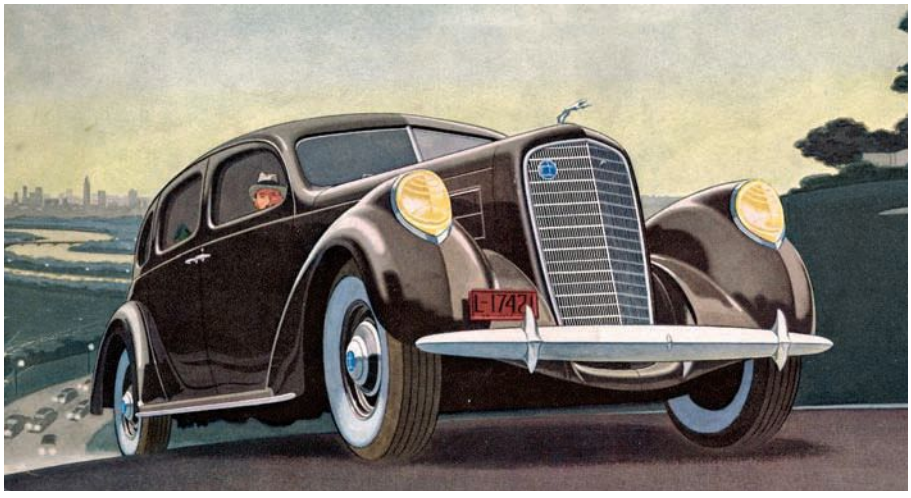
With Streamline Moderne styling influencing the way all kinds of objects were designed—everything from buildings to toasters—it left its mark on automobile design (see *HCC* #99 Dec. 2012). As a result, headlamp shapes would make the transition from drum to sphere to elongated oval with a point at its far end.

Die-cast bars were mounted between the headlamps themselves in the early 1930s. Buick, Peerless, La Salle, Jordan and Cadillac, to name a few, used this styling accent to note the make or number of cylinders their cars had. The headlamp bars then gave way to separate vertical posts for mounting the headlamps on, since by 1933 the shape of the radiator shell had evolved from a flat vertical plain to a more aerodynamic V shape. While headlamps became more bullet-shaped, their mounting posts evolved from strictly vertical to rounded, tapered and raked back at an angle.

The location of the headlamps in relation to the level of the radiator shell and fender line also became a major focal point in the overall appearance of the car. If a headlamp bar was used to mount the headlamps, it could be purely functional or it could also make a styling statement. The thin double-bar affect on the 1932 Chevro-



The 1932 Chevrolet had an attractive plated headlamp bar that was also used on its commercial line of sedan deliveries in 1933.



By 1937, the big Lincoln Model Ks had their headlamps added to the front fenders, emulating the style of the Lincoln Zephyr.

Auburn in 1931 used a vertical metal bar at the center of the headlamp purely as a styling concept to harmonize with the plated bar that bisected the radiator shell.

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This Dietz No. 3 headlamp was fueled by acetylene gas sent from a separate tank usually mounted on the running board or next to the chassis near the cowl.

A self-generating headlamp made by Powell & Hamner in England and imported into the United States would have been a fairly costly accessory. It weighs about 6 pounds.

let and Oldsmobile convey a very graceful design suggestive of a suspension-bridge roadway in profile. As the flat, sharp radiator shape gave way to softer, more rounded lines, drum headlamps ceased appearing.

Exposed radiator cores were now hidden behind shutters and intricately die-cast grilles. The headlamps that flanked them were styled to "go with the flow." Emblems and styling logos found their way to the top of the headlamp rim—Cadillac put its crest there, and the 1931 Packard's rim emulated the shape of its radiator shell.

Pierce-Arrow had been distinctive early on with the placement of its headlamps in the tips of its car's front fenders. It's interesting to see the form of these headlamps evolve from the Teens up until the last cars were built in 1938. Conventional headlamps mounted on a bar were available from Pierce-Arrow from the factory for customers who did not care for the distinctive trademark fender-mounted headlamps. The Pierce-Arrows exported to Europe all had to have the bar-mounted headlamps due to specific laws in those countries regarding location.

The inlet at the back of the Dietz headlamp is shown here; this is where the rubber hose attached to supply the gas to the headlight.

The fuel tank to hold the mixture of carbide crystals and water for the gas for fuel for a self-generating headlamp was contained inside the lamp itself, as seen here.

The huge headlamp on this 1936 Packard is an example of slipstream styling; all that metal to hold a small bulb for night vision.

Raised speed streaks were pressed into the sides and tops of headlamp buckets, and some of these that were painted body color saw die-cast decorative trim as an accent. The Packard 12-cylinder cars in 1932-'34 had a fairly prominent dorsal fin added to the center of the headlamp body running down the back towards the rear. The raked headlamp stands eventually moved their way up from the lower area between the shell and the fender to the midway point on the fender itself, and by the late 1930s to the side of the radiator shell. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, of course, and some cars' styling and location of the lamps, it can be argued, were more successful than others.

Some independent automotive companies took their treatment of style and location of their headlamps to a different

The burner inside the headlamp was accessed by opening the headlamp door that was hinged to the body of the lamp.

A headlamp and bracket for a 1933 Oldsmobile standing alone can be viewed as a work of art unto itself.

level. Hupmobile worked its headlamps into the shell and hood sides in 1935-'38 in a dramatic form that was blended to complement the overall styling of those magnificent cars. The Chrysler and De Soto Airflows also stepped up to flow their headlamps into the coachwork, as did Cord in 1936-'37 and Graham, with its totally new look, in 1938.

Headlamps eventually found their way into the front of the fenders. *Collier's* magazine had a drawing done of 21 makes of new cars and titled it "1939 on Wheels." It presented an excellently rendered overview of four-door sedans current to the market and showed that four makes had their headlamps mounted to the side of the shell, six were on top of the fenders, and 11 were in the front of the fenders blended in with their shape. From lanterns lit by kerosene and bolted to a bracket at the side of the front seat to slick slipstream styling integrated into the flowing design of the front fenders, the headlamp, in a mere four decades, made an incredible transformation.

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# Geoff Hacker

*The historian who's rescuing postwar fiberglass sports cars*

**BY DANIEL STROHL** • PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD LENTINELLO UNLESS OTHERWISE CREDITED

First sports car in America, it was the Corvette, right?

Wrong.

Okay, then the first fiberglass car in America, that was the Corvette, right?

Uh-uh.

All right, then the Corvette was at least the first fiberglass-bodied postwar American sports car powered by a six-cylinder engine. Gotta be, right?

Nope.

Students of automotive history will likely recall the Kaiser Darrin, maybe even the Woodill Wildfire or the Glasspar G2, as Corvette predecessors, but Geoff Hacker is no mere student of automotive history. Rather, he's more like a professor of it, with a concentration in postwar sports cars, fiberglass cars, sport customs and other one-off or limited-production hand-built vehicles that predate the 'Vette.

Geoff, who lives in Tampa, Florida, and actually serves as a professor in his day job, is probably best known to devotees of the odd and unusual as one of the cofounders of Forgotten Fiberglass, a website with a focus on the earliest fiberglass body builders: among them LaDawri, Allied, Byers, Kellison and Glasspar.

But fiberglass cars are a mere sliver of his obsession, one that ties together all the disparate attempts by individuals—everybody from Frank Kurtis to Mickey Thompson to Dean Moon to Bill Burke to Merrill Powell—to build a new automotive landscape in the years after World War II, one which ignored the status quo and explored what were then high-tech solutions to automotive construction that anybody handy with a wrench and a torch and a little know-how could implement.

"To some extent, Detroit was building its concept cars based on what they saw people building across America at the time," Geoff says. "In 1953, the two fastest cars in the world were fiberglass cars, so why wouldn't these be outstanding stories to tell?"

It is, as Geoff put it in an article he coauthored for the Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance, "the greatest American car story never told." And Geoff's the one telling the story.

Before he could start to tell it, however, Geoff had to research it and piece it together, a task easier said than done. "Because of the fragmented history of these cars, we have not fully assessed their impact until recently," he wrote in the Amelia Island article.

Geoff's interest in relatively unknown fiberglass-bodied cars dates back to the summer of 1980, when the then-17-year-old bellboy whose first car was a 1955 Cadillac spotted a Covington Shark roadster—a fiberglass car built on a Renault chassis during the Sixties—moldering away not far from where it was built in Tampa Bay. "It looked like a car from the future that came back to the past and then crashed," he says.

He inquired about it, and was rebuffed, but then his persistence paid off when he spotted it for sale not long after in the local classifieds and quickly went to see it once again. The seller recognized Geoff and


*“It was my basic curiosity from being a professor. I wanted to know more, I wanted to know how big the breadbasket was, so I started a quest for knowledge.”*

**Wedged into Geoff's backyard is a circa 1978 Cimbria that he bought from its original builder who drove it just 500 miles.**

**Over in Geoff's storage unit reside a 1952 Singer, a copy of the Cunningham C1 called the *Voodoo Gardner*, a 1954 Chicagoan concept, and in the foreground an Urbacar.**

agreed to sell it to him for $350, despite fielding higher offers for it.

Fortunately for Geoff, one other Floridian took an interest in the Shark, though not necessarily to buy it. Rick D'Louhy, then of Safety Harbor, had happened to research the Shark and contacted the sellers to offer his research to the eventual buyer. They followed through and for the next few years Geoff and Rick restored and continued to research the Shark. In the process of doing so, Geoff not only met and befriended the Covington family but also discovered a second Shark convertible in El Cajon, California.

And then, life took over for Geoff. College, graduate school and a career. He donated the two Sharks to a local museum and began restoring a house. Cars became almost an afterthought for him until 2006, when he came across another Covington Shark—this one a coupe—for sale and decided to buy it. He then retrieved both convertibles from the museum and, with all three under his care, took it upon himself to learn as much as he could about vintage fiberglass cars.

"It was my basic curiosity from being a professor," he says. "I wanted to know more, I wanted to know how big the breadbasket was, so I started a quest for knowledge."

That quest involved, first and foremost, gathering other like-minded researchers to his cause. Rick, of course, was on-board, and the two eventually met dozens of others who had something unique to add, another piece of the puzzle Geoff was assembling: literature collectors including Alden Jewell and Ron Kellogg; authors including Harold Pace, George Dammann, Perry Zavitz, and Bob Cunningham; historians including Karl Ludvigsen and Raffi Minasian; and curators including Leslie Kendall and Jeff Lane.

Original literature, which oftentimes proved difficult to acquire, also proved valuable to Geoff's research. Geoff and Rick began to assemble a library of forgotten texts—independent and regional hot rodding and automotive magazines of the Fifties, programs from the Petersen Motorama and other car shows, the brochures and press releases that small fiberglass car builders distributed in their attempts to also build a business out of their dreams—some of which predated the mass-market national car enthusiast publications, some of which featured the only glimpse the public might have had of a tinkerer's or inventor's attempt at automotive glory.

Even more valuable than literature, however, have been the contacts Geoff has made with some of the individuals responsible for the first wave of fiberglass cars in the Fifties, people like Powell, Burke, Noel and Ed Bangert, Bill Tritt, Frank Hecox from Glasspar, Phil Cox from Woodill, and Jeri Clark from Grantham. Interviews with them provided a direct link to the history Geoff had been piecing together, insights into the engineering and economical challenges fiberglass car builders faced at the time, and hard data on the 800 to 1,000 various fiberglass bodies built by around 100 to 150 different companies from about 1951 to 1957. Even when—as has often been the case, given that Geoff's research has taken place 60 years after the fact—the original car builders have died, Geoff has found that their families often go to great lengths to tell their stories and to share their memorabilia.

Unsurprisingly, Geoff, Rick and their allies have turned up more than mere literature and information over the last decade. They've also come across plenty of the cars themselves. Sometimes recovered in varying states of disrepair and disintegration, sometimes retrieved from rafters still in their gelcoats and never previously assembled into a complete car, the cars range from the interesting, such as the 1953 Maverick Sportster, to the incredibly obscure, such as the car Geoff and Rick have dubbed the "California Sport Special" in lieu of its given name, which they've yet to uncover in their research.

Before the end of 2006, Geoff and Rick had bought a Grantham Stardust, a LaDawri Conquest, and a one-off transporter once owned by Dean Moon so they could haul their fiberglass cars in style. Then over the

**In front of Geoff's house: the silver 1961 Covington that spurred Geoff's fiberglass car research, a 1978 Aerocon Boa, a white 1958 Victress S1A, a red 1955 Meteor SR1, and the last remaining 1968 SWM Gordini (gold). Below, a glimpse of the collection at Fiberglass Farms.**

next decade, they assembled a collection of more than 60 cars, plus another 10 bodies and spec-built chassis for fiberglass cars of the era, with more coming out of the woodwork and arriving on Geoff's doorstep all the time. Road trips that Geoff and Rick take, whether across the country, or just a few states away, inevitably result in a trailer stacked with more cars and bodies for their collection.

Geoff has a decent enough relationship with his neighbors, but even with fiberglass cars packing every nook and cranny of his backyard, side yard and driveway, he doesn't have enough room for them all. As a result, he stores some of the cars and parts in a jam-packed storage unit nearby, he's sent five out for restoration at area shops, and the rest he keeps at what he calls Fiberglass Farms, a friend's rural property where some of the most unique vehicles in the world rest under drooping Florida fauna.

"Fiberglass Farms is an artifact in time," Geoff says. "It looks like a junkyard, but I can pick any car there and take it to Amelia Island or Pebble Beach."

That would sound like a stretch for most folks, but Geoff and Rick have—with support from Bill Warner and Ken Gross—displayed cars at the Amelia Island Concours eight times, at Pebble twice, and at multiple other concours events across the country, sometimes curating entire classes as they went.

"We've taken this out of the woods," Geoff says. "We've had to create classes for our cars—like the sport customs class at Pebble and Concepts Beyond Detroit at Amelia—in order to go, but all the classes we create are based on research first."

Nor do Geoff and Rick stop with concours classes. The two have also guest curated exhibits at museums including the Petersen in Los Angeles, given presentations on fiberglass and homebuilt cars, written articles for national collector car magazines, and have appeared on a number of television shows to discuss their quest to document these cars. They've even started to make molds of some of the more desirable and difficult-to-find cars.

As a result, Geoff says, interest in the cars has been picking up in recent years. "We're getting more calls from people who've been priced out of the Ferraris, the Maseratis, and the OSCAs," he says. "They want something unique and stylish and not a clone, so they come back to these cars. You don't see many of them go unsold when they come up for sale these days."

And indeed, values for some of the more popular fiberglass cars of the Fifties have grown as Geoff has raised their profile over the last decade. But for Geoff, pursuing obscure fiberglass cars of the Fifties is about more than just money.

"If I hadn't found that Shark in 1980, or the coupe in 2006, I'd probably have found another 1955 Cadillac and be happy as a clam, but I wouldn't have had all these adventures," Geoff says. "That excitement I felt when I first found the Shark, when coming across something I don't know and then tracking it down—it's the same excitement repeated and repeated again these days, hopefully with better research."

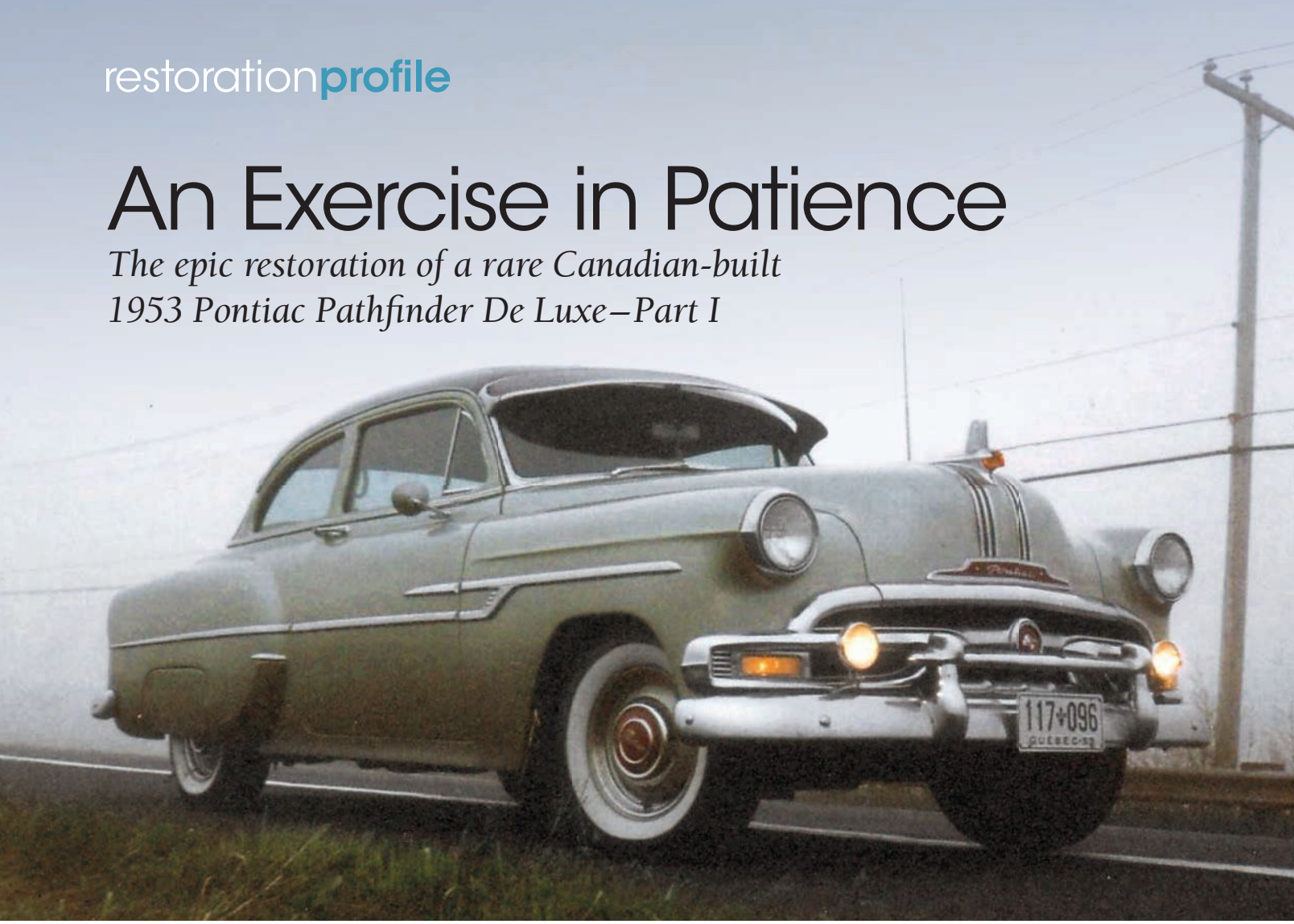
**Also in storage is a 1953 Piranha Speedster that Geoff calls the "Blowfish." Stacked atop it is a body for a CRV Piranha.**

And as Geoff and Rick continue to research, rediscover and restore fiberglass cars, they find that their quest isn't likely to end anytime soon. "We have no shortage of cars and their stories," he says, citing as an example the Galileo he recently purchased out of San Francisco that had never appeared in any contemporary magazines. "I think we have a compelling case to grow and reach more people."

GEOFF HACKER

# An Exercise in Patience

## *The epic restoration of a rare Canadian-built 1953 Pontiac Pathfinder De Luxe—Part I*



**BY MATTHEW LITWIN** • RESTORATION PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF ANDRÉ FITZBACK

"When I was searching for an old car, I started looking at General Motors products from 1949-'54. Make and model was no matter to me. The simple, round, no-fin rear three-quarter passenger view from that era is the most beautiful to me," says André Fitzback, explaining his passion for the particular automotive design that led him to the car featured here: a 1953 Pontiac Pathfinder De Luxe.

A mechanic by trade and resident of St. Hyacinthe in the Quebec province of Canada, André located his ideal car for sale near Montreal in 1995 and, although he was able to negotiate its purchase, it was not devoid of needs. According to André, "It was in poor condition overall. The interior needed work, it had no brakes, wore four different tires, and the engine ran rough. But the price was right, and I knew I could fix it mechanically over time while I began driving it, which was my original objective anyway."

With an initial investment of $40, André was able to return the engine—a 118hp, 239-cu.in. straight-six—to as-new condition with a simple valve job and a new set of gaskets. Over the next nine years, he and his family were able to slowly resurrect the interior while enjoying shows and tours to the tune of 22,000 miles on the odometer. Then, starting in the summer of 2004, the Pontiac's handling and performance slowly began to change.

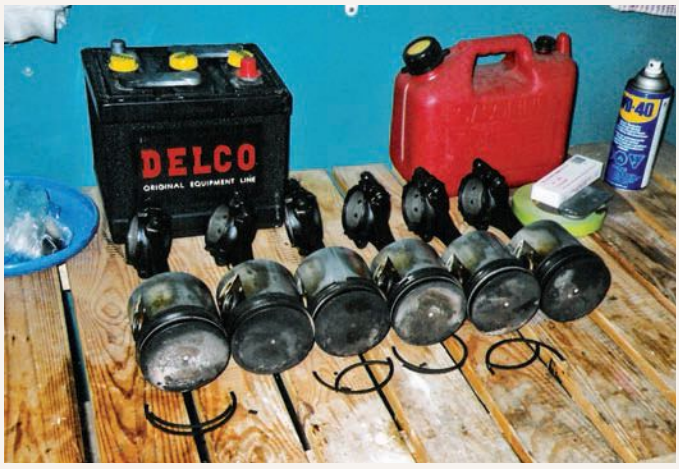
"As I was driving it, I started to notice some clicks and creaks emanating from under the car. Also, the engine was not performing as it should have been. At the time, the noise didn't faze me; however, when my friend wanted to use the Pontiac for his wedding in 2005, I knew I was going to have to fix the engine; there was an enormous amount of blow-by, and it was running more on oil than gas. With help from my wife, Patricia, I pulled the straight-six and did a complete rebuild, repainted the block and redetailed its associated parts. The engine was all set, but then in 2006, I really started to notice that whenever I made a turn, everything was moving on the car; I mean everything—the doors, the steering column and even the glass. It was a really weird experience."

A quick inspection revealed excessive rust had caused the frame to separate itself from the Pathfinder's two-door body. With safety now compromised, André knew it was time to subject his Pontiac to a full restoration. As he would learn, however, this was no ordinary Pontiac. It was a product of GM of Canada, which blended the attractive body design of a Chevrolet with the upscale refinements of a Pontiac. This merger of parts went beyond the obvious, affecting the frame, several body panels, key trim pieces and a number of mechanical components, making an already difficult task fraught with unforeseen pitfalls.

Join us as we recount in a series of installments the tale of André's efforts to restore a rare collector car north of the border.

By the spring of 2005, the 239-cu.in. straight-six Pontiac engine was in dire need of a proper rebuild, prompted in part by a then-forthcoming wedding. It was hoisted out after removing the hood, cooling system, bolt-on accessories and cylinder head.

André's wife, Patricia, assisted with the engine rebuild. Here she's using a spring compressor—a small but essential tool—to alleviate pressure on the valves to facilitate their removal; a task made easier with an adjustable height engine stand.




An indication as to the engine's health in 2005 is on display in this image. Arrayed in order of removal, piston rings are not supposed to easily fall off in multiple pieces, as is the case here. This explains the blow-by that was increasing with each passing mile.


Rebuilding the engine gave André the time to not only properly re-detail the engine block, but also its bolt-on equipment and the forward sections of the engine bay. By July, the Pontiac was again running properly; however, new issues quickly arose.

Over the next several months, André took notice of how much the body was shifting while making turns. A cursory examination of the body mounts revealed a significant quantity of corrosion that nearly allowed the body to separate from its frame.

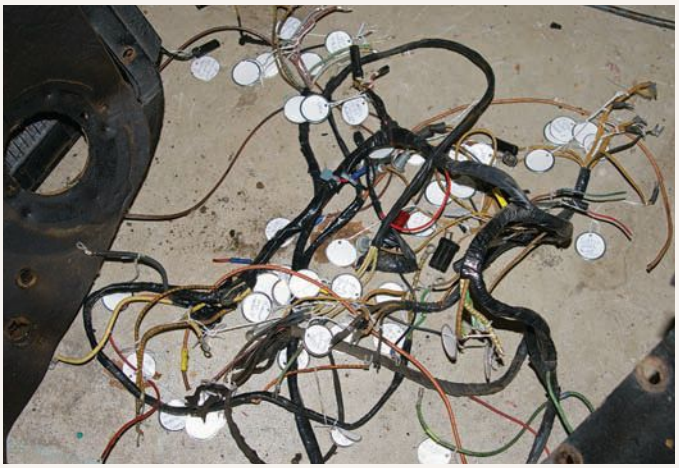
Spurred by safety concerns in 2006, André decided to restore the Pontiac. Disassembly began to reveal the extent of the hidden damage. Here a taillamp bezel has been removed; the metal below has been eaten away by years of unchecked rusting.

It may only be a single shelf, but this arrangement kept expensive-to-replate chrome trim out of harm's way and organized during disassembly. Trim that would be difficult to distinguish whether it was left or right was tagged accordingly.

After several key pieces of trim were removed, including the bumpers and grille assembly, the body panels followed. Initial assessment of those and the inner panels lead André to believe that little would need to be done in terms of metal repair.

It must have been unsettling to discover that several bolts that were used to secure the body to the frame had become useless once corrosion and stress had sheared them in two. André began to consult with factory manuals to determine proper replacements.

Many restorers have used the bag-and-tag method of keeping track of small parts, which we've mentioned several times prior. This was André's variation of the process: A simple numbering system that corresponds to detailed entries in a notebook.

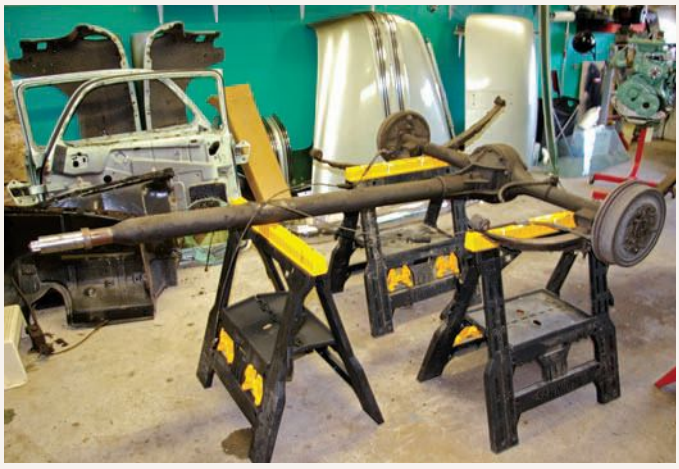


What appears to be a tangled mess of electrical wiring and connectors is the forward section of the Pontiac's wiring harness. Note the number of circular tags attached, which document the original connections to equipment and other junctions.

Although proficient mechanically, André knew body and paint were not his forte, and he found a shop in early 2007 willing to rebuild the shell and panels. The bodyshell was delivered on the chassis, then the two were finally separated with ease.

With the body removed and the Pontiac's frame exposed, the hard reality set it. While the body mounts were known to be a problem area, look closely and you will note that even the rear leaf-sprung suspension system was destined to fail.

Pulled from its frame mounts, the recently rebuilt straight-six was again placed on an engine stand. It would prove to be a twist of fortunate timing as the 118hp engine seemed to have developed a problem just prior to André opting for a full restoration.



A sigh of relief was breathed when the Pontiac's torque tube and rear differential assembly were removed and carefully examined. Containing a 3.55 final drive gear, the housing as well as the gearing and axles would prove to be sound.

While André worked in his garage, the body shop began work on the coupe's shell, slowly removing protective factory tar from the underside while media blasting some small sections. Bare metal was then given a sloppy coat of defensive primer.

After it was rebuilt and thoroughly cleaned, the torque tube/differential assembly received several coats of primer. While it was curing, the backing plates received a final coat of chassis black paint and were readied to receive new drum brake components.

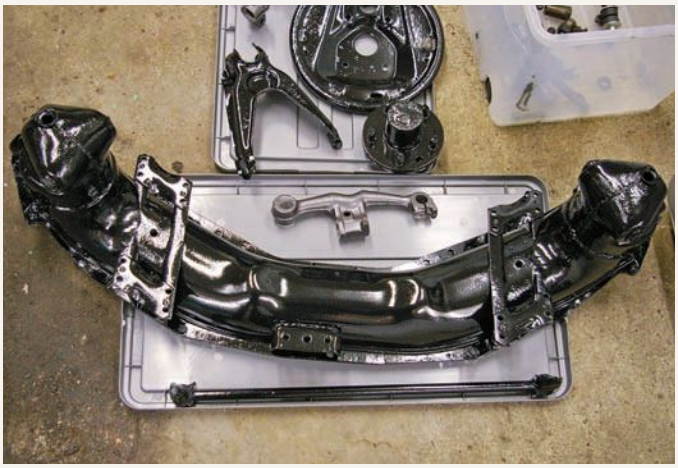
Having again consulted factory manuals, André found a solid 1949-'52 generation replacement frame located 5,000 kilometers away in British Columbia. Obtaining it became a family vacation; however, this new frame had a big surprise in store for André.

Once given a factory-correct coat of chassis black enamel, the rear end was reassembled with cleaned axles, new bearings and seals and a new hydraulic brake assembly, the latter including carefully hand-fabricated lines and new wheel cylinders.

A few weeks after the body's delivery, André returned to the shop to check on its progress. Unfortunately, other than the initial—and minimal—efforts to clean the underside, little had been done, as evidenced by the untouched rust along the rear wheel well.

To complicate matters, André also found that the body had mysteriously received a whole new series of dents, along with a vast number of other maladies, while it was in the shop. Apparently, the body man had succumbed to a fit of uncontrolled rage.

This image demonstrates the value of not disposing of damaged items prior to the completion of a project. Needing to quickly rescue the body from a now out-of-commission shop, the original frame was converted into a makeshift perfect-fit dolly.

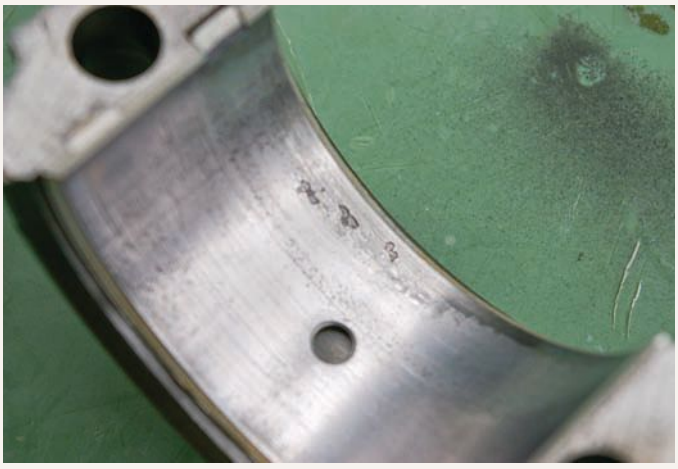


As other crisises were being managed, efforts were nevertheless being dedicated to the litany of small projects that consume time, such as cleaning and repainting the removable front crossmember and other key front suspension components.

Rather than send items to a specialist, André resurrected them within his own shop. This included the Delco master brake cylinder, which was carefully cleaned and examined before the cylinder walls were honed. New seals and paint completed the assembly.

With refinished parts ready, the front suspension system, including a portion of the steering system, was reassembled in a clean, well-organized space utilizing a well-balanced stand to assist the effort. New parts included ball joints and kingpins.

Focus shifted back to the Pontiac straight-six; it was believed another valve was the culprit. However after removing the cylinder head it was confirmed the knock that had developed just prior to the start of the restoration originated elsewhere.



While examining the bottom end it was determined that a year-old crankshaft bearing had begun to fail. Unsure if it was a flaw within the metal or perhaps another unseen issue, the decision was made to go through the engine for a third and final time.

As the engine was disassembled, each part was laid out to match its original location within the block. It was a fortuitous decision in that several bearing showed signs of premature fatigue, prompting a much closer examination of each removed part.

Spurred by the less-than-ideal condition of the engine, and in spite of its seeming ability to function properly, the Powerglide two-speed automatic was examined. Not surprisingly, signs indicated that the unit should be rebuilt sooner rather than later.

Over the next several weeks the Powerglide was carefully dismantled and slowly rebuilt with painstaking precision while work was underway to solve a significant issue with the new frame obtained earlier. Join us next month as the saga continues.

# Ford V-8 For 1938


You'll like the 1938 Standard Ford V-8. It's a better car in many ways than the 1937 Ford V-8 which was bought by more people than any other make.

You'll like its clean, new curves . . . its nearly tailored interiors . . . the easy way it starts and steers and stops. You'll like the privilege of picking the V-8 engine size you need . . . 85 horsepower for unusually high performance . . . 60 horsepower for unusually low operating cost.

Best of all, your liking for the Standard Ford will include the price tag! It is priced low – even for 1938 – and its prices cover equipment for which you have too often had to pay extra . . . You'll save money the day you buy your Standard Ford V-8 and every mile you drive it. You can bank on that.

The 1938 De Luxe Ford V-8 cars are entirely new in appearance. They *look* big and *are* big. Closed sedans have longer bodies with more room and larger luggage space. The general appearance is longer, more streamlined. Fenders are deeper, more massive. Rich interior appointments match the outward beauty.

The new De Luxe steps right into the higher style field – in *appeal,* but not in *price.* It provides a new kind of value for those who have been paying more than the De Luxe Ford V-8 costs – gives them what they want in size and luxury at a lower price.

There are eight body types in the new 1938 De Luxe line, all powered with the brilliant 85 horsepower V-type 8-cylinder engine: Fordor Sedan, Tudor Sedan, Convertible Sedan, Phaeton, Coupe, Convertible Coupe, Club Coupe, Convertible Club Coupe.

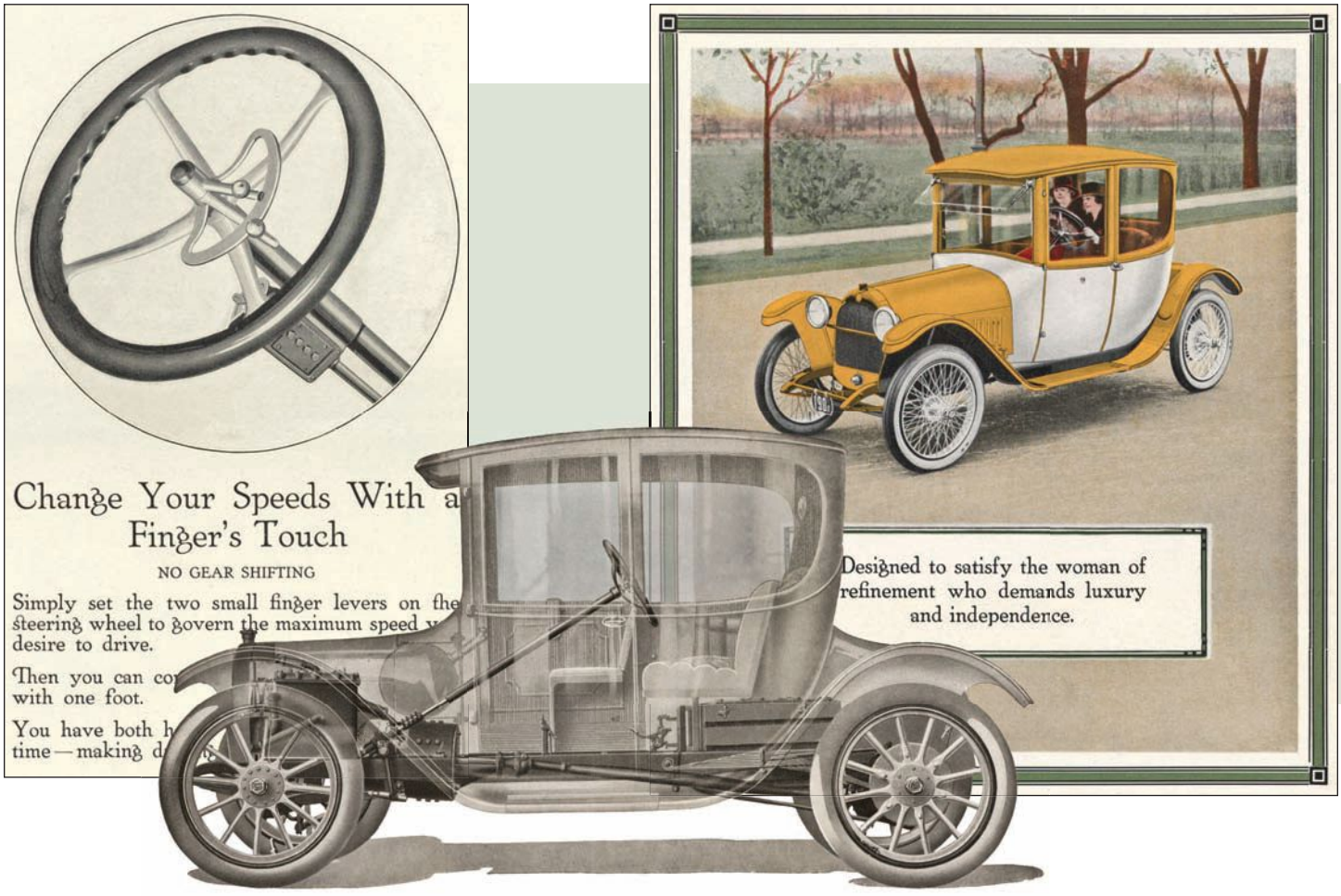
In the 1938 Standard Ford V-8, the longer hood and flowing curves add a new touch of grace and beauty. Interiors are spacious, neatly trimmed and appointed. It is built on the same 112-inch chassis as the new De Luxe, to the same standards of mechanical excellence. And it offers a choice of V-8 engine sizes – 85 hp for Ford V-8 performance at its brilliant peak – 60 hp for the greatest economy in Ford history.


The 60 hp Standard Ford V-8 is a big, comfortable, modern car that brings eight-cylinder enjoyment right down to the base of the low-price field – in first cost *and* operating cost. The "Thrifty Sixty" won an enthusiastic welcome from more than 300,000 owners last year. Many reported averages of 22 to 27 miles per gallon – some even higher.

There are three Standard body types – the Tudor and Fordor Sedans, and the Coupe.

BY CHRIS RITTER
ILLUSTRATIONS COURTESY OF THE AACA LIBRARY

# Woods Dual Power




**WHEN THE MOST RECENT GASOLINE-**electric hybrid craze hit the United States in the first decade of the 21st century, many people thought that the automotive manufacturers had developed a new technology. The truth is that gasoline-electric hybrid technology was first used in automobiles 100 years earlier. In fact, the technology was already nearly two decades old when the Woods Dual Power was offered to the public in the 1917 model year.

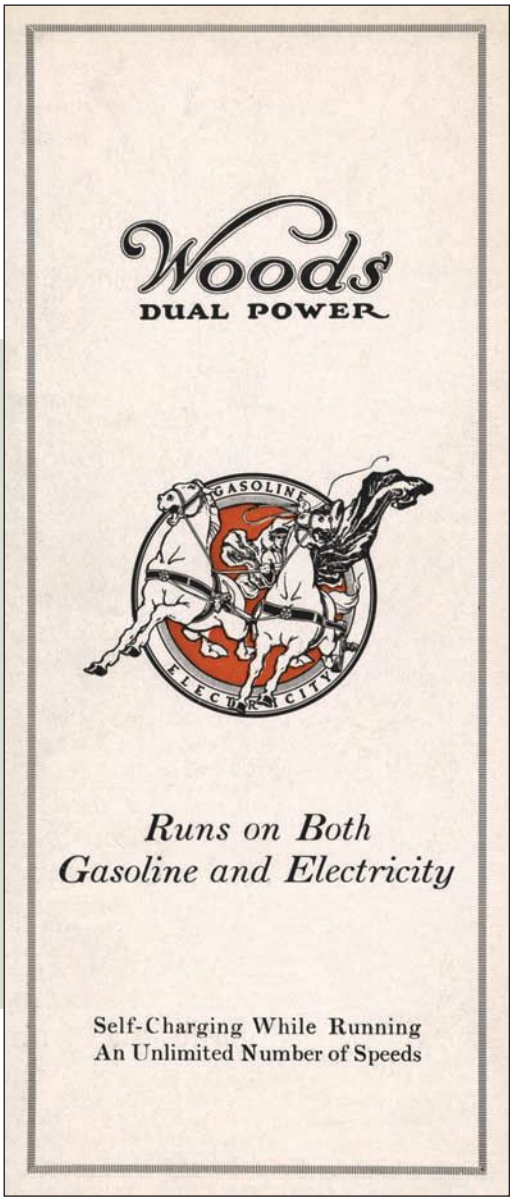
Woods, like other early electric car manufacturers, watched its sales steadily dwindle after Cadillac introduced the electric starter in 1912. While Woods supplemented its electric production with gasoline automobiles from 1905-1907, it focused exclusively on electrics for the next nine years. The Dual Power was a last-ditch effort to save the already struggling company, and it described the hybrid as the best of both worlds: the simplicity of operating an electric coupled with the range, power and speed of a gasoline automobile.

The 1917 promotional brochure produced by Woods measures 4 x 9 inches and opens to a 16 x 9-inch spread. It's here where we learn that the aluminum-bodied Dual Power "is a beautiful, roomy, easy riding, four passenger car that any woman can drive – and it's a smart, powerful car for a man." The car ran on a 110-inch wheelbase, and its in-house-built four-cylinder gasoline engine generated 14 horsepower. According to the brochure, the electric motor produced an additional 20 horsepower.

Regarding operation, the brochure reports the car "is started as an electric car alone." When the car reaches six MPH, the gasoline engine kicks in and the gasoline and electric systems work in tandem up to 20 MPH. For speeds greater than 20 MPH, the gasoline engine operates exclusively, "neither charging nor discharging the batteries."

An illustration in the center spread of the 1917 brochure highlights the Dual Power and shows off its "simplicity, elegance and convenience." Using the finger-operated steering wheel controls, the driver has complete control of the electric motor and gas engine. There is "no clutch pedal, no shifting levers, and no transmission gears" as power is "applied direct from the motors to the wheels."

In 1918, Woods increased the wheelbase of the Dual Power to 124 inches and used a Continental four-cylinder engine. The 1918 brochure opens to 23½ x 18 inches and features full-color illustrations




of the Dual Power in green and yellow.

In the 1918 brochure, a close-up of the steering wheel is shown, focusing on the finger levers and push-button gear selector. Emphasis is also placed on the car's dynamic braking system—the same system used in 1917—where the electric motor lever is retarded at speed and the motor acts as a generator and slows the vehicle. For speeds below six MPH, and in emergency situations, mechanical brakes were applied.

The brochure promises that the Dual Power "will give an infinity of speeds," but, the reality was a top speed of 35 MPH. This relatively low speed coupled with an astounding price tag of $2,950 was too much for the market to bear, and the Woods Motor Vehicle Company would be out of business by the end of 1918 with a total production of 1,166 cars.

BY MILTON STERN

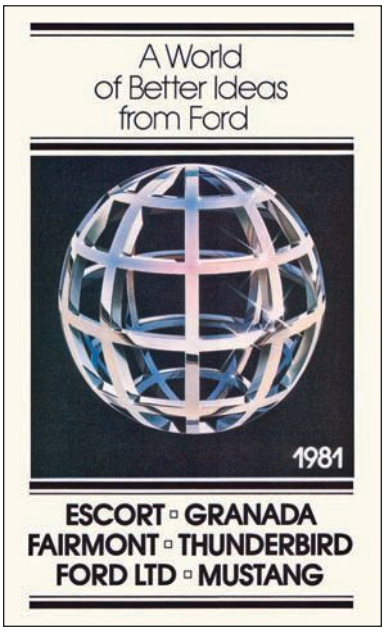
# Ford's Worldly Escort

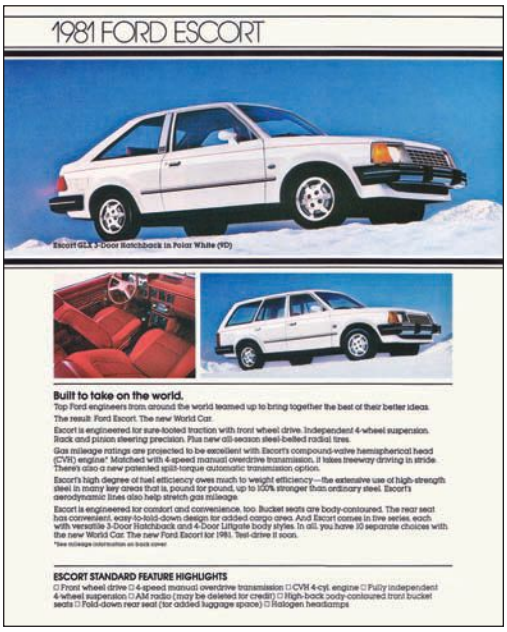
**IN A MARKET ENAMORED WITH** imports since the first energy crisis of 1974, American automakers had a couple of choices: Import cars and rebadge them, design a new car to compete, or do a combination of the two. A few months ago, I highlighted the Chevette, which was Chevrolet's world car. While it was based on the company's internationally successful T-car platform, it was reengineered and redesigned for the American market—and quite successfully. Chrysler, after offering its own share of captive imports, introduced the Horizon/Omni twins, America's first front-wheel-drive sub-compacts, whose development had been aided by the automaker's European subsidiaries. I remember traveling in Europe and seeing Simca Horizons that were twins to their American cousins.

Ford had an advantage because its European cars were (and still are) among the best-selling across the pond. When the American automakers were having their last bit of trouble seven years ago, a few economists even suggested Ford could abandon the American market and still be a key player worldwide due to its success in international markets, which brings us to this month's underdog.

In the 1960s, Ford was a leader, creating the midsize segment with the 1962 Fairlane and the pony car with the Mustang in 1964, making GM scramble to compete. But by the late 1970s, Ford seemed to ignore the tides of change and dig in its heels. It was two years behind in downsizing and still selling the controversial Pinto as its subcompact offering.

Introduced in 1980 as a 1981 model, the Ford Escort was an American version of the third-generation European Escort, "created by a vast pool of design and engineering talent in the worldwide community of Ford Motor Company." Ford's front-wheel-drive sub-compact replaced the Pinto (and essentially, the imported Fiesta) and would eventually offer more models than its predecessor(s). The first year included a two-door hatchback and a four-door station wagon, both with actual room for rear-seat passengers. The Escort was the best-selling car in the United States in its second model year. The Escort would evolve with yearly trim changes and slightly more modern styling through 1989. In 1990, Ford switched the Escort to its Asian Ford Laser (Mazda-based) platform, sold through 2002.




The Ford Escort was powered by a 1.6-liter hemi overhead-cam inline-four generating 65hp. Transmission choices were a three-speed automatic or a four-speed manual with overdrive in fourth. A five-door hatchback was introduced a year later. In lieu of a blue oval, which made its return on the Fox-based Granada in 1981, the Escort sported a "globe" badge on the front fenders alluding to its "World Car" status. A 1982 styling update included the blue oval. A base-model, two-door hatchback could be bought for $5,518 in 1982, which is around $13,885 in today's dollars—still a bargain.

In 1983, an LX model replaced the prior GLX model and featured a fuel-injected engine, blackout trim and cast-aluminum wheels. Along with a new dash, the automatic gear-selector was now in a straight line instead of the Mercedes-like zigzag. A five-speed manual was also optional.

An interesting off-shoot was the Ford Escort EXP, a two-seat sports model aimed at the Plymouth Horizon TC3 as well as sporty imports.

Beginning in 1983, there was an Escort GT model with a multi-port EFI version of the 1.6 L four-cylinder with 85hp. A five-speed manual, TRX handling package, front and rear spoilers, alloy wheels and fog lamps completed the look. The 1.6 L engine was then replaced by a 1.9 L engine in mid-1985, and Mercury's twin, the Lynx, was laid to rest after 1987.

Of all the Underdogs I have highlighted over the last three years, the Ford Escort is the strangest, and here is why.

Just about any cheap vintage car is fun to see at a car show or in a road rally. Somebody shows up in a Pinto or a Vega, and that car will generate enthusiasm.

But, an Escort? Let me tell you a story. I run all my errands in my vintage cars. I was loading my groceries into the trunk of my Hudson Jet-Liner one day when a man pulled up next to me in a 1984 Ford Escort. He asked me about my car, and after giving him more information than I am sure he wanted, I asked him about his Escort. He bought the Escort a dozen years earlier for less than $1,000 and used it as his daily driver. I told him to hold onto the car because it was going to be a collector's item. He laughed at me and asked what I had been smoking.

There you have it. An Escort may just be the quintessential vintage daily driver that you can pick up for little cash and will never have to detail for a car show or rally. After all, you don't want the other participants to think you've been smoking something funny.

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BY JIM DONNELLY

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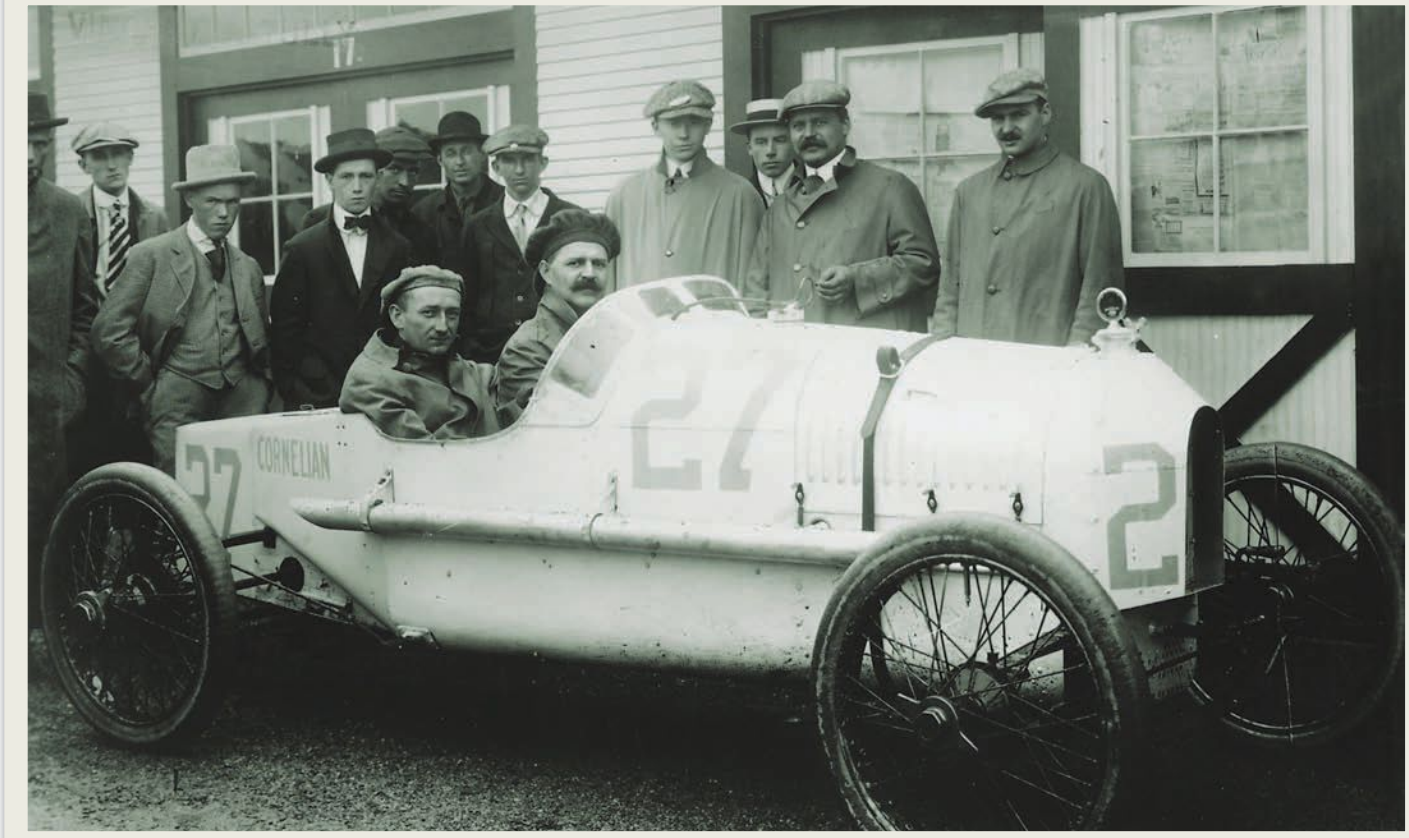
# Louis Chevrolet




**Louis Chevrolet is behind the wheel at Indianapolis in 1915 with Joe Boyer as mechanic. His brothers Arthur and Gaston are on the far right.**

**IT'S LIKE THE GOLDEN ARCHES AND** the NFL shield: The "Bowtie," as it quickly came to be called, which symbolizes the Chevrolet automobile, is one of the world's most instantly recognized consumer trademarks. One might wonder, more than a hundred years after Chevrolet first hit the streets, the origin of the brand name. Here's the answer. The Chevrolet car has many fathers, but first among them were four Chevrolet brothers—and among them, Louis Chevrolet stood out as a highly accomplished mechanic, designer, racing driver and administrator.

The brothers, Alfred, Arthur and Gaston, hailed from the Bernese Jura region of La Chaux-des-Fonds in Switzerland, where Louis-Joseph Chevrolet was born in 1878. Their father was a watch- and clockmaker, so they were exposed to precision work from childhood. In 1887, the family relocated to France, where Gaston and Arthur were born. Louis' father continued to work in the timepiece trade while Louis and his brothers became obsessed with bicycle racing, then a top-tier sport in Europe. There's a possibly apocryphal story that's made the rounds for years about a chance meeting between Chevrolet and the American playboy/sportsman/future race impresario Willie K. Vanderbilt, who was vacationing in France and became impressed with the boys' mechanical skills and commitment to racing. As the tale goes, he encouraged them to move to America, where their talents might be more profitably used.

In the years that immediately followed, Chevrolet made his way across the ocean and divided his time working on French-built cars for dealers in New York City and Montreal, Quebec, and serving as a chauffeur. In 1902, his brothers arrived from France, and Chevrolet took a position fixing Fiats in Manhattan. It would prove to be a pivotal couple of years because in 1904, he watched the first race promoted on Long Island by his alleged mentor, Vanderbilt. He decided to devote himself to racing. His first race is believed to have been in 1905, during which he set a speed record, beating the great showman Barney Oldfield. He later went on to race for Darracq, briefly holding a land speed record that he set at Daytona Beach.

All of this came to the attention of the entrepreneurial William Durant. Louis and Arthur Chevrolet had both moved on to Michigan and become factory race drivers for Buick, although repeated injuries ultimately forced Louis from the cockpit. Durant was in the process of buying Buick and merging it into his newly formed General Motors. Later, in part because his surname rolled easily off the tongue, Du-

rant encouraged Chevrolet to sign on with him and design a new, six-cylinder car that would bear his name. It didn't take long before he and Durant were feuding over the price and market position in the new car. Louis stalked off in a huff, selling his GM stock along the way, and thus forfeiting what would have eventually made him an extremely wealthy man. Barred from using their own name on subsequent cars, Louis and Arthur came to create the Frontenac, which enjoyed a multi-year skein of success at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, where Louis brought one home seventh in 1919. The following year, Gaston Chevrolet tasted victory at Indy, breaking a long European stranglehold on the race, becoming the first driver to complete the 500 miles without a tire change. Gaston was a phenomenally good driver, and was leading the AAA national points when he pulled onto the dangerously fast Beverly Hills board speedway, tangled at blinding speed with Eddie O'Donnell, crashed and died.

Gaston's death drove his brothers out of racing for good, although Louis did come up with an OHV cylinder head conversion kit for the Ford Model T, also called the Frontenac, which was a pioneering piece of early American speed equipment and proved to be hugely popular. He died in 1941. Today, a bust of his likeness stands sentinel over the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

# Gerald Nyquist

**Product Test Engineer**
***Ford Motor Company***

**FOLLOWING GRADUATION FROM** Lawrence Institute of Technology (now Lawrence Technological University), Southfield, Michigan, in the summer of 1963 at the tender age of 22, I embarked on my first professional job, Product Test Engineer at the Ford Research and Engineering Center in Dearborn, Michigan.

I recall being paid $535 per month and not imagining what I'd do with all of that money, but a learning experience in this regard was my purchase of a shiny, new 1963 Mercury Monterey convertible.

We must have had the longest departmental name in the corporation: Body and Chassis Testing Laboratory Department. Located in the so-called New Body Building, short walks down the halls took us not only to an upscale cafeteria and a barber shop, but also to the experimental paint shop that provided advanced views of prototype vehicles slated for production, as well as various specialty vehicles. All needed to be painted, and this is where it was done.

Development of the first Mustang was in full swing; I'll never forget my first glimpse of this exciting new car in the paint shop. Following President Kennedy's assassination in November of 1963, the Lincoln presidential limousine was in for repainting after armor plating had been added. Small documents were copied on a stinky OZALID blueprint machine, but eventually something really revolutionary replaced it—a Xerox machine manned by an operator; we sometimes stood in line.

Our department was a service group, providing testing services for anything from small components to complete vehicles. Dozens of "bench tests" were always in progress, and instrumented cars were run through their paces on the nearby Dearborn Proving Ground with motor-generator units strapped on to provide electrical power for the equipment. A rather subjective measure of vehicle ride was the so-called "assometer test" where execs would pass judgement, apparently in some past instance one saying "it hurts my ass."

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF I.TELEGRAPH.CO.UK

As a so-called "engineer in training," I rotated through several positions, conducting strength, wear and durability tests. I recall testing the durability of wheel bearing seals sprayed with a grit solution, the metal fatigue life of valves, door assembly slam durability, frame static beaming and torsional stiffness and power steering gear durability, just to name a few examples. Having a knack for designing tests and test fixtures, I often was assigned projects that were anything but routine, even though I was the new kid on the block.

One of my supervisors was of the opinion that any automotive component should withstand a two-to-three foot drop to the floor without damage, so when customers showed-up with widgets to be tested, he'd sometimes shove them off of his desktop for the impromptu test, much to the surprise of the onlooker. Most everything passed.

Even though I was enjoying my job, I left Ford in 1965 for a full-time position in the Biomechanics Research Center at Wayne State University in Detroit, embarking on a career in biomechanics, researching human tolerance to impact and vehicle occupant crash protection. These were the early days of the modern auto safety movement, when little was known of the body's impact tolerance and how to design human-like crash test dummies, instrument them, and interpret the data. We also did extensive design and testing of prototype airbags under contract with the federal government and with the auto manufacturers.

I have always felt that the Big Three never received proper recognition for their extensive pioneering efforts in making cars safer. For example, much of what is known about human tolerance to impact stems from university contracts funded by General Motors Research Laboratories, and some of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Standards were based on procedures already in use at GM.

I went on to complete masters and doctorate degrees in applied mechanics, after which I held several crash safety-related positions at General Motor's Technical Center before resigning in 1982 to start an engineering consulting business. Now happily retired, at age 75 I enjoy cruising with and showing my 1951 Plymouth Cambridge and 1989 Cadillac Brougham and, of course, reading *Hemmings Classic Car*. The memories are priceless; there was never a dull moment.

**I Was There relates your stories from working for the carmakers, whether it was at the drawing board, on the assembly line or anywhere in between. To submit your stories, email us at editorial@hemmings.com or write to us at I Was There, c/o *Hemmings Classic Car*, 222 Main Street, Bennington, Vermont 05201.**

# 10th Annual Hemmings Motor News CONCOURS D'ELEGANCE

## SEPTEMBER 23, 24, 25, 2016

**Keynote Speaker: Lee Holman**

Owner of the Holman & Moody Charlotte-based racing operation that was responsible for the Ford GT's 1-2-3 finish at LeMans in 1966. Certain to provide fascinating insider information on Ford's historic performance onslaught!

## FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 23rd

### REGISTRATION & RALLY

- 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Registration at the Saratoga Automobile Museum, 110 Avenue of the Pines, Saratoga Springs, New York.
- 12:00 noon – Join in a Rally through the beautiful Adirondack region
- 2:00 p.m.– 4:00 p.m. Cruise scenic Lake George, Queen of the Lakes, aboard the Adirondac Shoreline cruise – **w/luncheon buffet** (boarding promptly at 2:00 p.m.)

***Deadline to purchase Lake George Cruise tickets: 9/2/16***

## SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24th

### CRUISE-IN SPECTACULAR

Gates open at 8:00 a.m. An all-makes car show that's open to cars, trucks and motorcycles. Including: muscle cars, street rods, sports, exotics and classics.

Awards at 2:00 p.m.

Cocktail reception with cash bar at 6:00 p.m. and dinner available at 7:00 p.m. at the Courtyard Marriott. Keynote Speaker/Honorary Chairman: Lee Holman, President of Holman & Moody.

## SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25th

### CONCOURS d'ELEGANCE

9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. Open to concours-quality, pre-1974 cars, by invitation only.

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Winners also will appear in the pages of *Hemmings Motor News* and *Hemmings Classic Car.*

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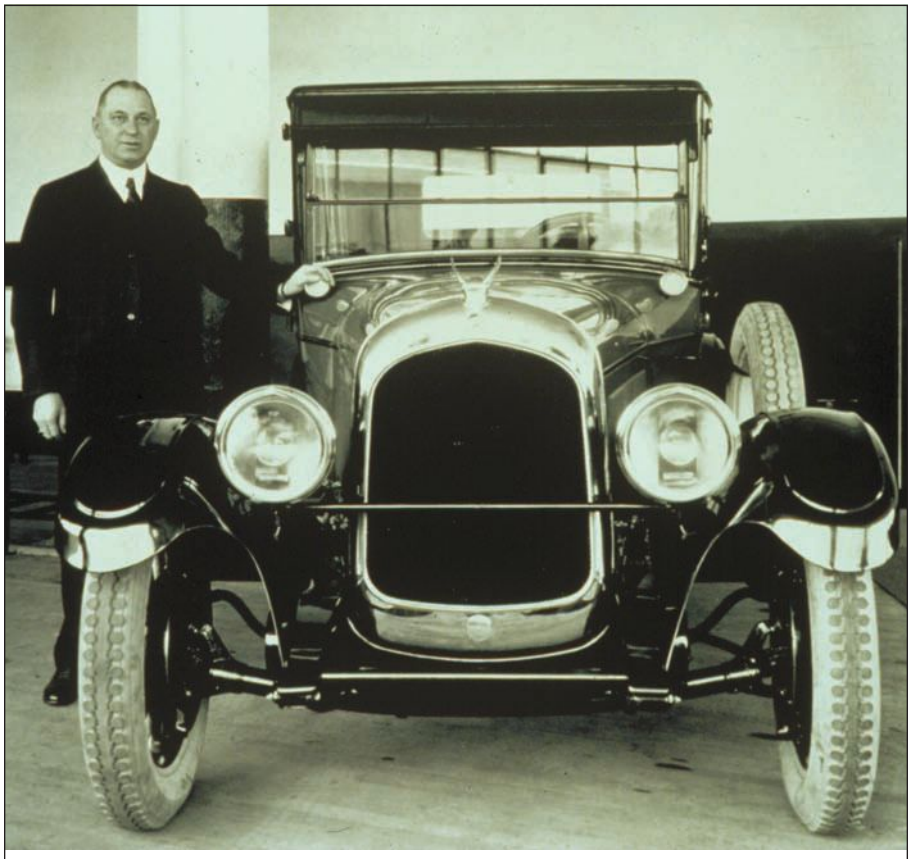

**CHRYSLER DEBUTS ITS NEW 1924 CHRYSLER SIX. THIS REVOLUTIONARY CAR FEATURES** a high-compression engine with a seven-bearing crankshaft, carburetor air cleaner and replaceable oil filter. Stopping is achieved through use of four-wheel hydraulic brakes. The new Chrysler Six is available in nine body styles as low as $1,195.

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New house – $5,200
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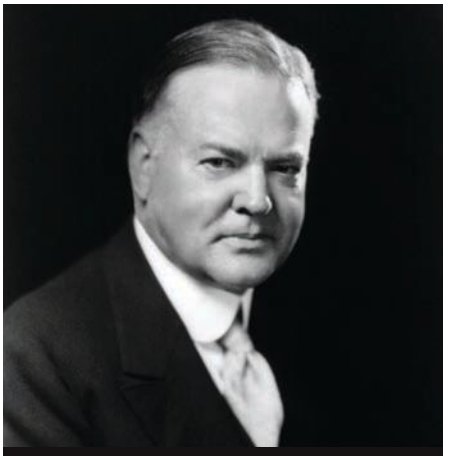
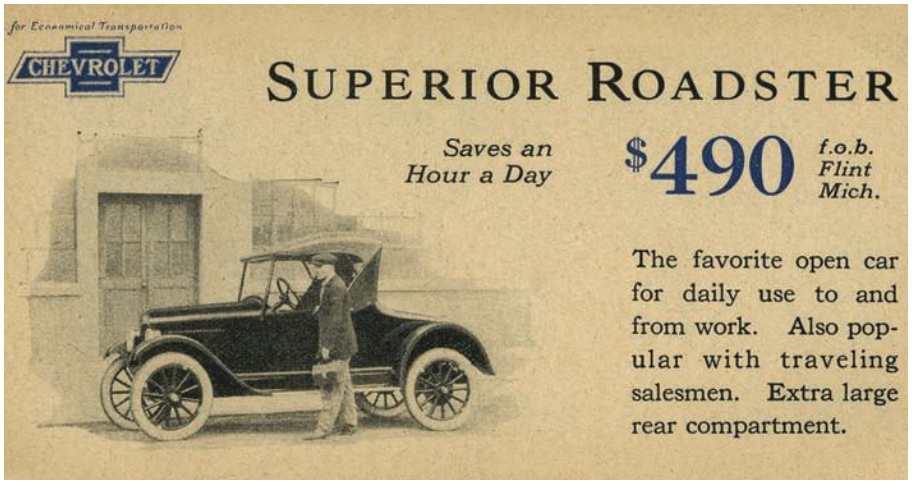


**SECRETARY OF COMMERCE** Herbert Hoover chairs the first National Conference on Street and Highway Safety, calling for uniform traffic laws.



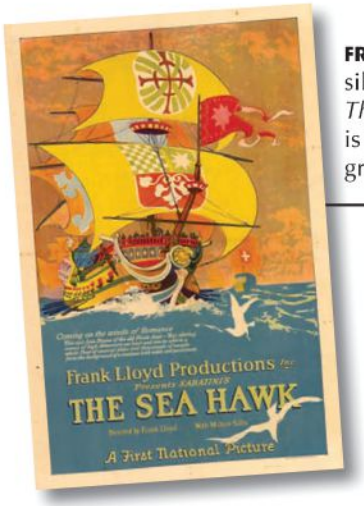

**CHEVROLET CONTINUES ITS GROWTH AND ITS AUTOMOBILES ARE WIDELY KNOWN FOR** lower costs per mile than any other cars on the market. All models feature a powerful valve-in-head engine, three-speed sliding gear transmission, electric starting and lighting and improved springs and brakes. Nine body styles are available, with a selection of open and closed models starting as low as $490.


**FORD IS ABOUT TO PASS ANOTHER** milestone as the 10-millionth Ford will be produced this year. The Model T continues to go strong as the open cars are back with the same body but a higher radiator and larger hood. The three-door touring and two-door runabout are still affordable, available as low as $260.

**INCUMBENT PRESIDENT CALVIN** Coolidge wins the United States presidential election over John W. Davis and Robert M. La Follette Sr.

**THE WASHINGTON** Senators defeat the New York Giants four games to three, winning the World Series.

**AL JOLSON RECORDS** the song "California, Here I Come" from his Broadway musical *Bombo*.

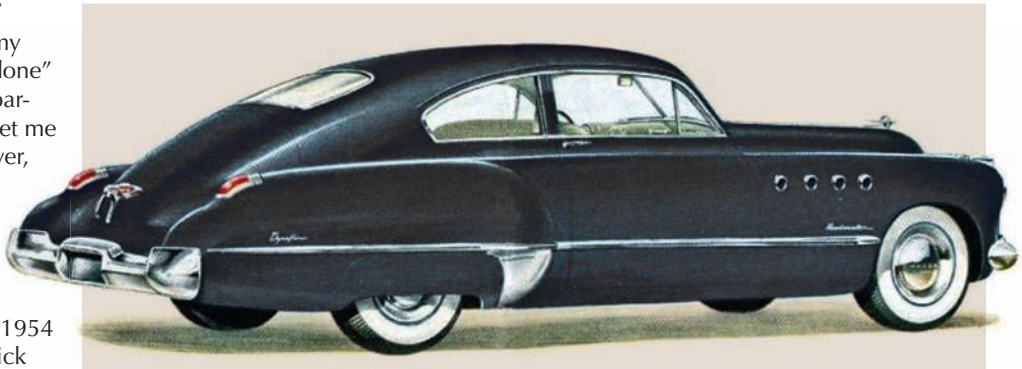



**FRANK LLOYD'S** silent film *The Sea Hawk* is the top-grossing film.

BY DAVID ROBINSON
ROCK HALL, MARYLAND

# My 1948 Buick

**THE SUMMER OF 1959 WAS FAST** approaching, and transportation for my summer job was high on my "to-be-done" list. After some discussions with my parents, a decision was finally made to let me purchase my first automobile. However, my father was quick to point out that a provision of my college financial aid award was that I could not own an automobile. We'll deal with that later, I thought to myself. A call was made to my aunt, who was driving a 1954 Mercury Sun Valley at the time. A quick call to her favorite salesman, Jim, was the next step. As Jim began phoning around looking for a decent, but reasonably priced used car, a coworker overheard him and suggested that his father's car was available.



THE ROADMASTER SEDANET, MODEL 76-S—Here's the gracious, racy look of a Coupe, combined with the spacious roomy interior of a Sedan. A steady goer with its two-ton-plus, ideal for a family of youngsters with its two doors.

So, the next night, Dad and I headed off to see what was destined to be not only my first car, but the first in a long line of cars that I have often regretted selling. Standing in the parking lot facing one of the service bay doors, we waited patiently as Jim went in to open up. As the electric door slowly rose, the solid bold chrome grille of a 1948 Buick appeared.

A Buick—wow, my excitement was now on overdrive. The door continued to rise and soon the Buick sat there in all its full glory. And what a car it was—a 1948 Roadmaster Sedanet model, gloss black, fog lamps, a spot light, wide whitewalls, all-weather shields on the windows. I was almost breathless as I took in the sight of this car.

The exterior was immaculate, all of the chrome shone brightly. The interior appeared never to have even been sat in. It had a "three on the tree" manual transmission, and an AM radio with its center swiveling exterior antenna. And when we opened the engine compartment, with that wonderful side-opening hood, there sat the smooth-running Buick Fireball straight-eight engine, with no sign of dirt or spilled oil anywhere. It was just too good to be true. But I still didn't even know the asking price.

My father finally broached the subject. "How much?" he asked. "How about one hundred dollars?" Wow, even in 1959, when one hundred dollars was still a hefty sum to consider, I was ready to leap at the offer. My father sat still for a moment, and then said, "Okay." A born and bred thrifty Yankee, he knew that this was an offer too good to pass up. "Okay." And it was done. I had my first car, and what a wonderful car it was.

I still remember the ride home that night. The car started with a low, powerful rumble. And what a cool way to start a car—simply push down on the accelerator and the engine sprang into action. Shifting into low gear, the Buick moved out so quietly I wanted to check to make sure that the engine was still running. And smooth riding—it had to be a pretty big bump before you even felt it. Having been raised on base model Plymouths and Fords, the difference riding in the Buick was dramatic. It was going to be a great summer.

That summer, I worked as a dump truck driver—every teenage boy's dream job. That first Monday, I pulled into the parking area, and my coworkers all came over to examine my "new" car. The "oohs" and the "aahs" were plentiful, and I felt great! I was on top of the world, driving back and forth to work in a beautiful automobile, and then getting to drive a truck all day long. But the best part was getting home from work, picking up friends and cruising around in my Buick.

Pretty soon the end of the summer was on the horizon. I knew what I wanted, but I was also pretty sure what I was going to be up against. It finally happened one night when my father asked, "So David, when are you going to put your Buick up for sale?" For sale? No way! Now was the time to put forth my best argument for keeping my Buick. "Dad, let's just put it in the back yard. I won't drive it until next summer, not even on school breaks. I will be able to work on it over the school year." And what I thought would be the clincher, "That way you can use it whenever you want." But Dad didn't budge, and so one Monday late in August I arrived in the parking lot with two For Sale signs in the rear windows.

"You're going to sell your car?" It was my friend Frank, rushing over to greet me. I nodded my head. "Wow, I'll give you five hundred dollars!" He didn't even ask what I was asking, and it was a lot less than five hundred. "Okay, I'll sell it to you." And it was done. I got to drive my Buick for another couple of weeks, but at the end of this grieving period, it was not my Buick anymore.

I never saw my car again. It was a great car, the first of a line of many nice cars that I have bought over the years, but nothing has been able to replace the thrills I had from driving around in that 1948 Buick. I still look over the Buick listings in *Hemmings Motor News* and wonder if that 1948 Buick Sedanette being advertised could be mine. Some look pretty close, but the asking prices are always a lot more than five hundred dollars!

It had been a great summer—that Buick gave me many wonderful memories.

# Hemmings Motor News

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# Always Up to the Task

*Chevrolet's 1955-'59 Task Force light haulers were as handsome as they were capable*


**BY MIKE McNESSOR** • PHOTOGRAPHY BY TERRY McGEAN

Chevrolet's edgy, upright Task Force trucks were a significant departure from the fat-fendered Advance Design rigs they replaced, late in the 1955 model year. Styling cues borrowed from Chevrolet's redesigned cars, such as hooded headlamps, egg crate grilles and wraparound windshields, made these trucks look fashionable yet still rugged. Beneath the stylized hoods, Chevrolet's all-new V-8 was available, and 12-volt electricals made sure the small block engine (or the base inline six) cranked over with authority.

Aside from the V-8, one of the most enduring features ushered in by the Task Force trucks was the Fleetside bed. Chevrolet's first bed with smooth outer bedsides, rather than bubbly rear fenders, was the 1955 Cameo Carrier. This truck proved to be not only a trendsetter but a hot collectible, as well, in years to come.

What made the Cameo's bed special was that it wasn't manufactured as an all-new body but rather an ingenious treatment applied to conventional step-side boxes. Special fiberglass skins, fabricated by the same company that handled the construction of early Corvette bodies—Moulded Fiberglass of Ashtabula, Ohio—were attached to the sides and tailgate of a standard pickup box transforming it into a Cameo.

The Cameo was in production for four model years, 1955 to 1958 and 10,320 examples were produced throughout the entire run. In 1955, Cameos were available only in white with red accents inside the box and around the cab. For the 1956 model year, eight colors were rolled out with contrasting hues available on the bedside inserts and around the cab glass. The 1957 model brought the arrival of a few more colors along with some trim

changes. The 1958 model year brought Cameo production to an end in February, when Chevrolet introduced its all-new steel Fleetside body and discontinued the Cameo's signature fiberglass fenders.

The 1958 model year also brought about the most significant restyling for the Task Force trucks. Again, taking a cue from Chevrolet's passenger car line, quad headlamps became standard up front while larger parking lamps were moved off the lower front fenders and incorporated into the grille. The grille, too, was revamped with a quartet of stacked louvers underscored by a thick chrome bar on which "Chevrolet" was embossed. Chevrolet also changed the names of its haulers in 1958, adopting "Apache" for light trucks, "Viking" for medium-duty trucks and "Spartan" for the big rigs.

The base light truck engine during the Task Force era was the 235.5-cu.in. straight-six. Customers wanting more power to tackle hauling and towing jobs could opt for the 265 and later the 283-cu.in. small-block V-8. The base transmission was a three-speed manual, and options included overdrive, a heavy-duty three-speed manual, a four-speed manual or a Hydra-Matic four-speed automatic.

Chevrolet light trucks of this vintage rode on a conventional ladder-type frame with steel rails connected by five crossmembers. The front axle on two-wheel-drive trucks was an I-beam type mounted on leaf springs, and drum brakes at all four corners were standard.


**Visibility was never a problem inside the Task Force greenhouse, especially on trucks like this 1958 equipped with the big back window. Interior upgrades seen here include custom seat upholstery, a Deluxe heater and chrome knobs on the switchgear.**

Today, all Task Force Chevrolet trucks from the second series, 1955 to 1959, are desirable as collectibles and enjoy broad support from the aftermarket. Due to a plentiful parts supply and an enthusiastic following, a Task Force truck can be an approachable, rewarding project.

Just ask Gary Stone of Nashport, Ohio, a full-time restorer who owns and rebuilt this month's 1958 Apache feature truck. Gary first laid eyes on the pickup while working in the collision shop at Hand Chevrolet-Volkswagen in Manchester, Vermont. He never imagined he'd own the truck, but sort of fell into it.

"It was taken apart 22 years ago at Hand, and we worked on it occasionally when we were slow," Gary said. "When I left that job in 1999, the shop manager asked me to work on it and get the cab in primer. I moved to Ohio in 2007, and the truck followed me. I began working on the truck again, but the owner asked me to

**The 283 was available in '58, but this truck left the factory powered by a 235.5-cu.in. six. With a one-barrel Rochester carburetor and 8.5:1 compression, the 235 was rated (gross) at 145hp and 215-lb.ft. of torque.**

hold off. In 2013, he called me, said he'd lost interest and wanted to sell it."

Gary checked with some contacts who he thought might be interested in acquiring the incomplete project truck, but was unable to strike a deal. Finally, he decided to buy it himself. "I had a few people who I thought might be interested, but no one came through. I had kind of wanted a truck, so I bought it, finished the work it needed and got it on the road in the spring of 2014."

When Gary acquired it, the chassis had been restored, and many of the hard undercarriage parts were powder coated. The engine was rebuilt and installed, but the body was in primer and only loosely fastened together.

Gary primed and block sanded the body, then sealed it and finished it with DuPont ChromaOne Acrylic Urethane single stage paint. During the reassembly, he upgraded the truck to the Deluxe cab adding an assortment of brightwork—window trim, headlamp surrounds, mirrors, bumpers, grille, etc.—as well as a Deluxe heater and more. The bed was customized with oak flooring as well as stainless hardware, and the original rims were decorated with trim rings and shod with whitewall radials. Inside, Gary also added custom upholstery to the original bench seat that was stitched together by a local shop.

The Apache's work days are well behind it now, as Gary drives it for fun and to car shows. In 2014, he trailered it back to Vermont to attend one of Hemmings' summer cruise nights, where we spotted the truck and later photographed it. "This truck has gotten more attention than any other vehicle I have ever owned," Gary said. "I currently have a 1962 VW convertible, but I've only driven the convertible once each summer since I put the truck on the road."

Driving the Apache in stock trim, with a 235-cu.in. six-cylinder and three-speed manual, keeps him off the interstates and highways, but Gary said he's happy with it the way it is.

"It drives like a 1958 truck," he said. "There's wind noise and it handles like a vehicle on leaf springs. At one point, I thought it would be a little more fun to drive if it had a more modern drivetrain and suspension, but I've decided unless something goes wrong, there's no sense messing with it."


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# Generation Bridge

*Learning to sell oil across the decades*

**BY JIM DONNELLY** • PHOTO COURTESY OF LEONARD MATTHEWS, FROM HIS COLLECTION

In the extreme southeastern corner of Idaho, the very home of purple mountain majesties, you will find the town of Montpelier. It's not very big, probably about 2,500 residents, but it's been there a long time. A city in Bear Lake County, history has it that Montpelier was first inhabited in great numbers by Mormons whose leader, Brigham Young himself, bestowed it with the name of the capital of his home state, Vermont.

Montpelier, Idaho, has something else in common with the Green Mountain State besides a town's name and gorgeous scenery. This being where the Rockies stab skyward on their way to western Canada, it gets cold in the winter. Cold enough, in some instances, to make steam from your cup of coffee nearly condense in midair. It was here, during the 1940s, that the gentleman in the photograph was doing something about that very issue. His name was Lee S. Wedel, and he was running the Texaco concession for petroleum products in Montpelier. It's a critical job to do right. Just like in Vermont, you will be in very difficult shape if your fuel-oil tank runs dry in, say, December.

The photograph shows Mr. Wedel in his 1930s Ford V-8 delivery truck, a moderate-sized fuel-oil tank bolted to its rear frame rails. The photo was snapped long before Leonard Matthews, who provided it to us, was even born. Leonard grew up in the house that you can see behind the truck. Mr. Wedel lived just on the opposite side of the street from the Matthews house, and Leonard considered him a friend and a mentor. Later, he would become more than that.

Leonard's father was a mortician in Montpelier, and had been for a considerable number of years. The calendar pages now flip forward to March 1968, when Leonard, fully intending to follow in his dad's footsteps, had received a college degree in mortuary science and was also trying to support a young family. He was licensed in Idaho plus neighboring Utah and Wyoming. As he recalled, "We moved on a weekend and on Monday morning, I showed up at the mortuary for work. Upon arriving, my dad asked what I wanted. I told him I wanted to work, what we had planned on through my schooling and training. He told me I needed to understand something, and I asked him what that was."

His father told him that there wasn't enough business to take him on full time, so he ought to go out and find a job. Again, this was in a fairly remote part of the mountain states. The only job Leonard

could find was as a disc jockey on the local radio station. Suffice it to say that he knew he'd never get rich there. But some good fortune did, in fact, appear: The radio station was on the outskirts of Montpelier, right next door to the American bulk oil plant, the brand that would later become known as Amoco. After lonely hours of broadcasting, Leonard became friends with the American agent who ran the bulk oil plant and coordinated its deliveries. The agent was from a big town, Salt Lake City, and didn't enjoy his petroleum career. He wanted to return to Utah so badly that he actually coached Leonard on how the oil plant operated, and put in a good word for him when Leonard applied for the job. He got it.

That, in turn, meant that Mr. Wedel was now something more than a neighbor and a friend. He was a competitor.

As Montpelier's new distribution agent for American, Leonard bought the bulk plant's delivery truck and furniture and went to work. Mr. Wedel wasn't his only competitor, as a Chevron distributor was next door, with a Phillips 66 distributor just a few blocks from his home. Business, therefore, was tight. But Mr. Wedel remained a stand-up guy, generous with suggestions on how to run and grow the distribution business. He was approaching retirement age, and as Leonard recalled to us, "He did not feel threatened by any of the rest of us, although before he quit, he had lost so much business that when he did retire, Texaco closed the plant. About three years later, the Conoco dealer in town also retired, and Conoco shut that plant down. About the same time, the independent dealer also closed his plant and sold his service station. That left only American, Chevron and Phillips open."

Family realities then intervened. Leonard's father was beginning to suffer failing health, which forced him to sell the Amoco plant, despite the fact that he had nearly quintupled its business in the decade that he owned and ran it. Leonard achieved his original goal, taking over the mortuary. Right around that exact time, Mr. Wedel passed away, and his widow presented Leonard with the photo you see here after he handled his funeral arrangements. It's a prized possession. "He was a grand old man," Leonard made clear. "Very set in his ways, but still a man who was very well thought of around Bear Lake County."

**We enjoy publishing period photos of authentic, old-time working trucks, especially from the people who drove them or owned them. If you have a story and photos to share, email the author at jdonnelly@hemmings.com.**

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| 450-18 | A | $119.00 | 475/500-20 | A | $139.00 | 33x5 | A | $269.00 |
| 525/550-18 | A | $129.00 | 600-20 | B | $159.00 | 32x4 | A | $259.00 |
| 600/650-18 | B | $149.00 | 440/450-21 | A | $ 99.00 | 33x4-1/2 | E | $269.00 |
| 475/500-19 | A | $ 99.00 | 525-21 | A | $149.00 | 33x4 | A | $269.00 |
| 550-19 | B | $149.00 | 31x4 | A | $239.00 | 34x4 | A | $275.00 |

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| 750-14 | 2-1/4" | C | $164.00 | 800-15 | 3" or 4" | B | $195.00 |
| 800-14 | 2-1/4" | C | $179.00 | 820-15 | Black | C | $175.00 |
| 950-14 | 2-1/4" | A | $229.00 | 820-15 | 1" or 2-3/4" | C | $209.00 |
| 670-15 | Black | A | $147.00 | 915-15 | 1" | C | $209.00 |
| 670-15 | 2-11/16" or 3-3/4" | A | $173.00 | 600-16 | Black | A | $144.00 |
| 760-15 | 3" or 4" | B | $186.00 | 600-16 | 3-1/2" | A | $169.00 |

SPECIALTY TIRES OF AMERICA, INC.


| TIRE SIZE | CINTURATO | PRICE | TIRE SIZE | CINTURATO | PRICE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 165VR14 | CA-67 | $199.00 | 185/70VR15 | CN-36 | $299.00 |
| 155HR15 | CA-67 | $269.00 | 205/70VR15 | CN-12 | $329.00 |
| 165HR15 | CA-67 | $229.00 | 205VR15 | CN-72 | $499.00 |
| 185VR15 | CA-67 | $389.00 | 185VR16 | CA-67 | $399.00 |

MICHELIN

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| TIRE SIZE | WW | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| 155/80R13 | 1/2" | $59.00 |
| 175/80R13 | 1/2" | $66.00 |
| 185/75R14 | 3/4" | $76.00 |
| 195/75R14 | 3/4" | $87.00 |
| 205/70R15 | 3/4" | $90.00 |
| 205/75R15 | 3/4" | $92.00 |
| 215/70R15 | 3/4" | $95.00 |
| 215/75R15 | 3/4" | $95.00 |
| 225/75R15 | 3/4" | $103.00 |
| 235/75R15 | 3/4" | $105.00 |

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| TIRE SIZE | TREAD | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| 550-15 (tube type) | 5-Block | $282.00 |
| 550-16 | 5-Block | $328.00 |
| 600-16 | 5-Block | $356.00 |
| 650-16 | 5-Block | $381.00 |
| 450/500-18 | 3-Block | $258.00 |
| 550-18 | 3-Block | $321.00 |
| 400-19 | 3-Block | $226.00 |
| 450-19 | 3-Block | $236.00 |
| 205/70VR14 | Dog Bone | $379 |
| 205VR14 | Dog Bone | $429 |
| 165VR15 | Dog Bone | $219 |
| 185/70VR15 | Dog Bone | $299 |
| 185VR15 | Dog Bone | $269 |
| 205/70VR15 | Dog Bone | $299 |
| 185VR16 | Dog Bone | $359 |

## SPEEDWAY

| TIRE SIZE | PLY | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| 600x16 | NDT 6-P.R. | $89.00 |
| 700x16 | NDT 8-P.R. | $114.00 |
| 750-16 | NDT 8-P.R. | $125.00 |
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| 30x3 | Black | $151.00 |
| 30x3 | All-White | $212.00 |

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| TIRE SIZE | WW WIDTH | PRICE |
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| G78-14 | 1", 2-3/4" or 3-1/4" | $165.00 |
| 560-15 | Black | $149.00 |
| 560-15 | 1" or 3" | $166.00 |
| 600-15 | Black | $152.00 |
| 600-15 | 1" or 3" | $169.00 |
| G78-15 | 1", 2-1/2" or 3-1/4" | $168.00 |
| H78-15 | 1", 2-5/8" or 3-1/4" | $169.00 |
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| 700-18 | $219 | $309 | $399 |
| 750-18 | $229 | $319 | $439 |
| 700-19 | $259 | $329 | $429 |
| 750-19 | $259 | $349 | $469 |
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| 650-20 | $180 | $299 | |

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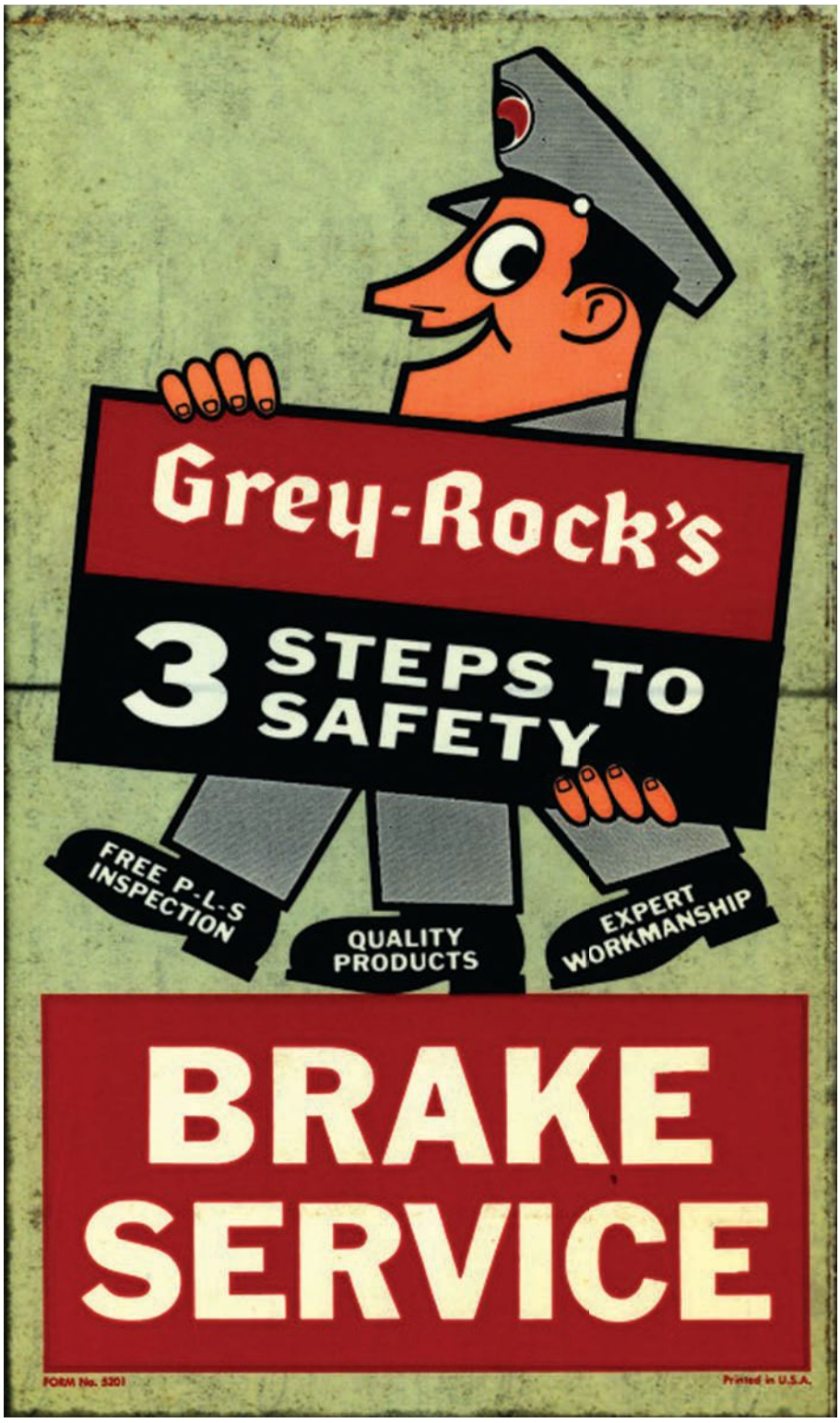


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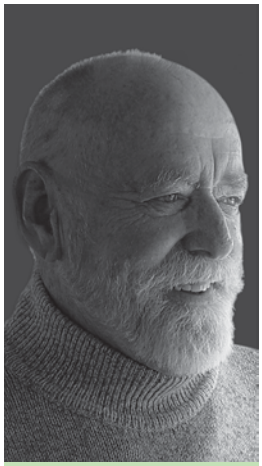

# Something Old, Something New

How many times have you seen automotive advertising that starts with something like: "The all-new Firewood BVD for 2017"? All new? I say, show me any car that is even close to being "all new." Are they saying that they have reinvented the automobile?

What they mean is that they have slightly restyled the bodywork to look different, and perhaps added a few cheap electronic gadgets that sound high-tech, but that you don't need and will never use. However, under the hood is the same old engine, surrounded by the same farmed-out jobber components as they have used for years.


Even the body panels aren't all new. Many are just reworked from last year, with a trim item or two glued to them. And the others are the same panels used on other cars from the same company. Truth is, that "all-new" car is just a rearrangement of components from various vendors to look a little different. It's a three-card monte, and this phenomenon has been going on for a very long time.

It started during the Great Depression when cash-strapped automakers had to make their products seem new—and last year's model seem old—in order to stimulate sales without spending a lot of money. In fact, it was during the 1930s that styling came into its own for just that reason.

Those were the golden days for Raymond Loewy, Gordon Buehrig, Ray Dietrich, Harley Earl and Amos Northup. They made Studebakers, Chevrolets, Auburns and Hupmobiles look new, when under their hoods were the same-old-same-old engines hooked up to the same-old-same-old running gear. There were exceptions of course, and new ideas such as automatic transmissions and hydraulic brakes came along, but not many.

The only car of the 1930s that came close to being all new was the 1936 Cord, and it was a failure. Yes, it influenced the future of automotive design like no other car of the era, but it had many developmental bugs, was difficult to build, and was too pricey as a result. The times just did not allow for the expenditure required to produce such a revolutionary product.

Then the 1940s were a developmental bust for the auto industry because of the war, so the cars weren't even styled to look new, with one exception: the Kaiser. But even the all-new Kaisers and Frazers had prewar Graham engines in them. Fords, Chevrolets, Pontiacs and Hudsons had basically prewar engines and running gear, too. And Plymouth used its trusty prewar flathead six in its economy models until 1959!

In the early 1950s, under the hoods of the "all-new" offerings was the same old prewar hardware, sometimes backed up by automatic transmissions. Styling evolved from the streamlined teardrop look to the flow-through boxy look pioneered by Italian designers such as Farina, and custom coachwork designers like Dutch Darrin, but underneath lurked Depression-era technology.

The longevity prizewinner of them all is the Chevrolet small-block V-8 that debuted in 1955. Updated variations of it, along with the older versions, are still in production today with millions of them on the road. It was arguably the most versatile American engine design ever, so GM said why change it except to make it more environmentally compliant and more efficient?

Meanwhile, I don't need to be conned into the illusion of driving an "all-new" car. Some people might be gullible enough to believe there is such a thing, but most of us know better. Oh sure, there is the keeping up with the Joneses one-upmanship of having a new one, but that lasts a short time, and costs a lot of money.

Me, I prefer all-old classics. They convey sophistication, style, individuality and even practicality because they are simple and rugged. I'll park my 1939 Packard convertible up next to a new Corvette any time. People might remark, "Oh, there is a Corvette," while they walk over to crowd around the Packard.

Now you might say, yes, but is it as good as a new Corvette? Well, how do you define "good"? Aside from being elegant, the Packard is smooth, quiet, and has lasted 70 years. And as for impressing people, there is no comparison. The old Packard wins hands down. You might say, yes, but can the Packard do 200 miles per hour? To which I would say, how many times have you needed to do 200 miles per hour, and do you have the grit to do it? The Packard will loaf along at 70, and that is plenty fast for me.

Give me an all-old car any day.

"Truth is, that "all-new" car is just a rearrangement of components from various vendors to look a little different."

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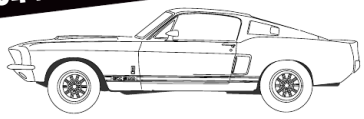

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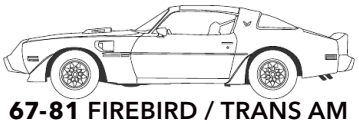

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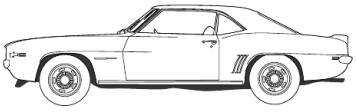

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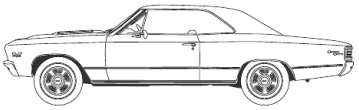

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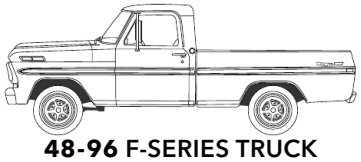

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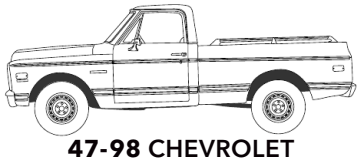

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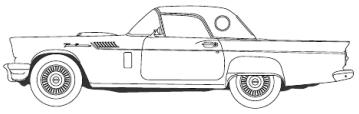

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