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JUNE 2021 #201



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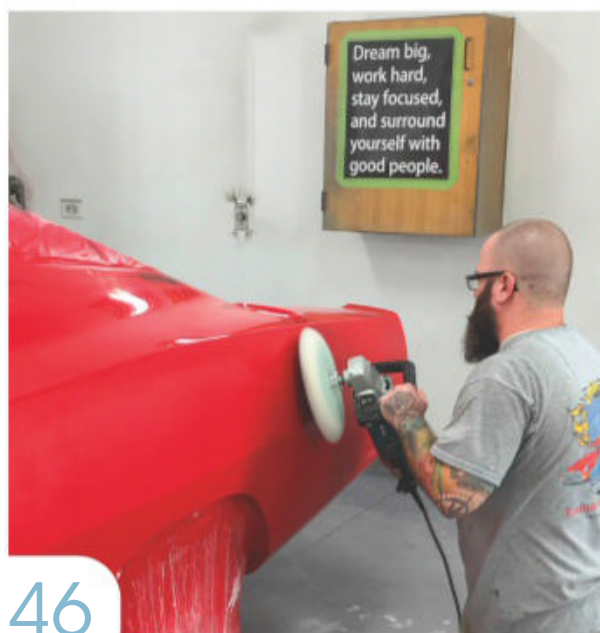
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ISSN# 1550-8730 • www.hemmings.com

Published monthly by Hemmings • 222 Main St., Bennington, VT 05201

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Subscription rates in the US and Possessions; 12 issues

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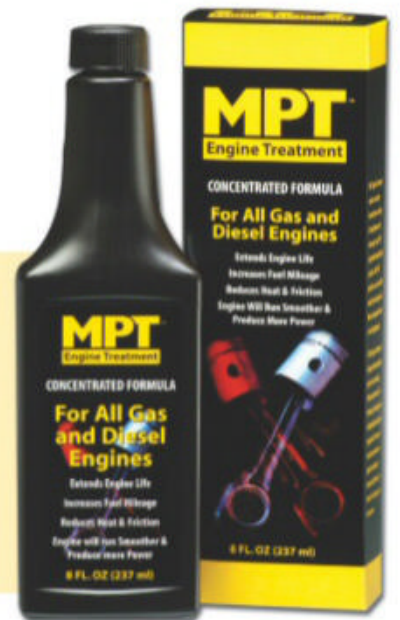
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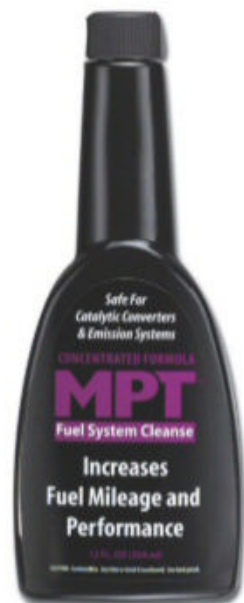
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Saviors of the Steel

I can still remember the feeling I had looking at the rotten rocker panels of a neighbors' MGB. This would have been around 1978, and the car was probably from somewhere between 1963 and '65. I was about 10 years old, and already long infatuated with cars, so the sight of the completely rotten rockers saddened me—I assumed the car was facing imminent doom. Surely such deterioration could not be reversed—once the metal has rusted away, what could be done?

The neighbors seemed very attached to that MG, for reasons no one would have questioned at the time. Sports cars had won many hearts during the postwar era in America, and the MGB became a staple in the '60s. Yet, while they were still building brand-new ones at the time, I lamented what I thought was the coming demise of that vintage B. Even then, it seemed like a truer version of its maker's original design.

Compromises to automobiles were the order of the day in the late '70s—American cars had lost their big engines and grown ungainly impact bumpers and plasticky interiors. Sports cars like the MGB were on their way out. I had the sense that cars of the present were in many ways watered-down versions of earlier models, and the word at the time was that the future of the automobile might get even worse.

With seemingly little to look forward to from the automakers, a desire to see older cars preserved was a logical reaction, and that MG wasn't the first time such thoughts had occurred to me. One sunny Saturday, when I was probably only six or seven years old, I was at a friend's house as his father started to work on the family's car, a '67 Chevy Malibu. This would have been around 1974, and the rust-belt winters had already eaten through the bottom of each of the Malibu's front fenders. My friend's father was about to attempt a repair using the classic Bondo kit—the can of filler that, I could swear, had a '65 Mustang on it even then.

Soon the dad was troweling a lump of the mud he'd mixed up into the fender hole, which, even to the seven-year-old version of me, seemed like a technique that wouldn't work very well. It didn't; the results looked more like a stucco repair than bodywork. When he'd begun this effort, I was intrigued—the can seemed to show that rust holes could be made to disappear with this product. By the time he was done, I felt like we'd both been duped.

Of course, I know now that the product *can* work, but some skill and experience are required... or at least, more persistence than my buddy's dad showed that day. I liked that Malibu. Even though it wasn't all that old, it looked like it was from

another era. The styling and details—inside and out—appealed to me, and I wondered if any like it would still be left by the time I got my license, which seemed impossibly far into the future.

That's probably where my interest in preserving and fixing vintage vehicles started, though it was launched with a sense that these cool old cars might keep crumbling in a way that could not be stopped nor reversed.

Bear in mind, during the 1970s, cars of the '50s appeared nearly extinct, at least in terms of what you'd see on the roads in New York. It seemed reasonable to think the cars of the '60s would go the same way.

So, when I rode my bike past the house with the MGB one day and saw that the rocker panels had been replaced with new metal, I was astonished. The image in my mind is highlighted with the gold tinge of the brazing material that had been used to fuse the new steel in place—a technique that would be frowned upon today, but a revelation to me then. I recall the sort of elation that came over me, that this car could be saved by returning what had been lost. Years later, the eldest son of the family drove that MG to our high school in the mid-'80s.

I continued my quest to garner insight into the techniques that would enable used-up, dilapidated cars to be returned to a former glory, always seeking to get past those skills that merely yielded a new appearance in favor of true restoration of a vehicle's elements. The first time I witnessed someone hammer welding a steel patch into a vintage body panel, yielding an invisible seam even in bare metal, I was transfixed—this was the ultimate cure for all those rusted bits I'd pondered over the years. I've been similarly amazed by others who were highly skilled in their chosen crafts as they replicated intricate upholstery patterns, hand-fabricated replacements for unavailable body stampings, or perfectly repaired broken castings that appeared to be junk.

Though I worked in automotive shops for a period when I was a student, and even did a stint as a grunt in a vintage car shop right after college, for the most part, restoration has always been more of a hobby interest for me, one I've not come even close to mastering. I continue to be intrigued by the efforts of those who have, fascinated by their results, and thrilled whenever a decades-old automobile is returned to a state that is at least as good as the day it was first built. Cheers to all those who make it happen. 🍷

Write to our editor-in-chief at tmcgean@hemmings.com.

//
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Klingberg Motorcar Event

KLINGBERG VINTAGE MOTORCAR SERIES ANNOUNCED THAT THIS YEAR'S SHOW WILL take place June 19, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., on its 40-acre campus in New Britain, Connecticut. All proceeds for the 29th-annual show, featuring Grand Marshal Wayne Carini, will directly assist Klingberg Family Centers' programs that help children and families suffering from trauma and difficult times. Accompanying the show will be a unique drive-thru event—that will be COVID conscious and safe—during which participants will be allowed to travel along a predetermined 20-minute route. All old cars (1989 and earlier) will be placed into different display areas throughout the grounds, starting with prewar concours automobiles. All cars will have extra space between them to maximize social distancing and all fees for car owners and spectators will be waived, though a donation is encouraged. For sponsorship opportunities and general information, visit klingbergmotorcarseries.org.



Legislation Honors Auto Hobby

LEGISLATORS IN SOUTH CAROLINA have introduced a bill to designate the automotive hobby as the official family-friendly pastime of the state. The bill (H. 3680) recognizes that the collection and restoration of historic and classic cars is an important part of preserving



the technological and cultural heritage of South Carolina. It will look to acknowledge the effect of the 100-plus-year history of the automobile and support all activities involved in the restoration and exhibition of classic vehicles. Embracing the spirit of the annual Collector Car Appreciation Day, officially recognized by Congress, the bill is currently awaiting consideration in the House Committee on Education and Public Works. To contact the members of the Committee and for more information, visit openstates.org/sc/bills/2021-2022/H3680.

Gilmore Museum Ready for 2021

GILMORE CAR MUSEUM IN HICKORY CORNERS, MICHIGAN, RELEASED THE 2021 season schedule with two dozen events taking place from June through October. Some notable shows will include a Micro/Mini Car World Meet on June 18-19; a Celebration of Brass on July 16-17, highlighting cars from 1916 and earlier; Lincoln Homecoming Weekend on August 14; a Pierce-Arrow Gathering on



August 29; and a Deutsche Marques Oktoberfest on October 9. As usual, Gilmore's Wednesday Night Cruise-In events with live music, food, and beverages will take place every Wednesday from 5 to 8 p.m. (EDT), through September.

"We're excited about the upcoming season of car shows, new events, and concerts at the Gilmore," said Executive Director Josh Russell. "It's a calendar full of things for our members, partners, guests, and first-time visitors to be able to see, hear, and experience on our campus."

All shows will take place at the museum's 90-acre campus. Attendees should prepare for social-distancing and safety messages. A printable version of the schedule can be downloaded at gilmorecarmuseum.org.

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7-11 • Packard Family Gathering
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17-19 • AACA Eastern Spring Nationals
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25-26 • Congress of Motorcars
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Time Travel at the Speed of a 1935 Speedster?

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Astroid

SPORT CUSTOM AFICIONADO GEOFF HACKER RECENTLY OBTAINED A UNIQUE 1960s SHOWCASE WITH TEXAS HISTORY, THOUGH HE'S YET TO determine the full extent of that history. All Geoff knows, so far, is that the car started out as a 1962 Chevrolet Corvair station wagon before somebody with visions in his head of the Chevrolet Monza SS — or perhaps the Bertone Testudo — removed the body from the chassis and set about reconfiguring it as a rear-engine single-seater. The Corvair's boot lid remained, only flipped around to serve as the engine cover. Corvair coupe quarter panels made it into the mix, as did a 1966 Buick Riviera hood up front. Everything in between is steel, not fiberglass.

Underneath, everything remains Corvair, including the front suspension, rear suspension, engine (albeit chromed to the nines), and drivetrain. Even the wheelbase remains at 108 inches. The five-lug wheels in the rear mount via a set of adapters.

The same cannot be said of the cockpit for the custom. The driver's seat, cut-down steering wheel, and pedal assembly have all been shifted to the center of the car, surrounded by what looks like black velvet, with no gauges, switches, or controls visible — just the shifter sticking up in its stock location.

Other than a 1982 title in car-show promoter Gerald Bartlett's name and a license plate with the name "Asteroid," there's no documentation on the car. The paint shows traces of red, then over that a dark blue background with airbrushed planets and other space objects and it was, at one point, dubbed the *Astroid*. (Join the discussion at HMN.com/Astroid.)

Does anybody recall seeing it on the show circuit? Geoff would love to hear more about it.

Limited Mobility

EACH TIME I SEE THIS MARION POST WOLCOTT IMAGE, I WONDER exactly how much "car" was left in this guy's house car, so let's try to determine what's going on here.

First, the facts: Wolcott took this photo in December 1940, outside Camp Livingston near Alexandria, Louisiana, as part of her work for the Farm Security Administration and Office of War Information. "Construction worker's trailer (home-made house car)" is all she wrote about it. (Read more at HMN.com/Wolcott.)

The house car sits on a Model T chassis, that much is evident, though as our resident "T" expert David Conwill noted, it appears to have Chevrolet wire wheels. It wouldn't have a crank handle hanging from its crank hole up front unless it had an engine to turn over, and a close look at the photo shows a crankcase-shaped shadow where one would expect. Similarly, as David pointed out, the construction worker wouldn't go through the trouble to make a cutout for the radiator unless he intended the house car to remain self-propelled. Also, if it were a trailer, where's the coupler?

On the other hand, that's an awfully tiny window through which to see while driving, and one would hope the construction worker sealed off the engine bay from the rest of the interior. One would also hope the worker never drove it at night.

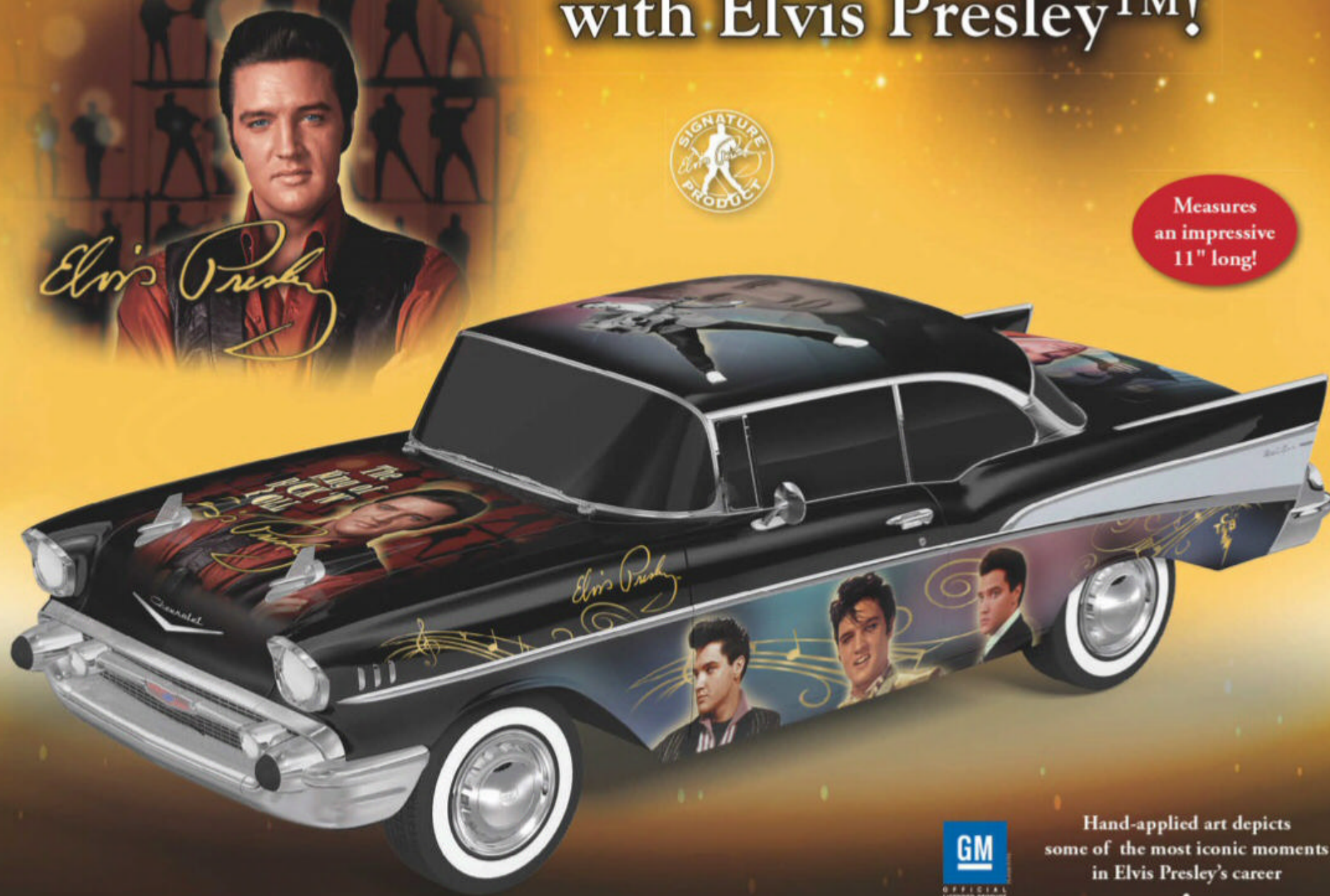


What say you? Was this a driveable vehicle? Could its remains still be decaying away on the Camp Livingston grounds? And who was the unnamed construction worker?



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 blog.hemmings.com/index.php/category/lost-and-found.

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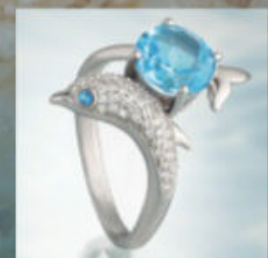
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I ENJOY READING PAT FOSTER'S

columns. Regarding "The Packard Executive" in the January issue (*HCC* #196), I agree that there should have been marque separation, but I think what killed Packard was an engineering screw up. I was a young gearhead in the mid-Fifties, and I believe Packard's screw up was that it put an aluminum-cased automatic behind that monster torque V-8 engine.

Its engineers didn't design in enough gussets to handle that torque and they were hammered with many, many transmission problems, because the aluminum case was twisting. Packard's reputation for reliability was damaged drastically and thus sales suffered accordingly. Too bad. Great car gone.

Bob Boyd

Lansdale, Pennsylvania

HAVING READ MR. STERN'S ARTICLE

about the Renault Dauphine (February, *HCC* #197), I just had to drop a line to tell you my experience of owning Renaults.

I graduated high school in 1963 and, having a steady job, I purchased a new '63 Dauphine. What a great car. But after having it a little over a year I totaled it in a wreck, so I bought a 1964 Dauphine. The horsepower was upped to 40 and Renault put in another gear, going from a three-speed to a four. I kept this car for about a year and a half and traded it for a Renault 8. The R8 had the softest seats of any car I have ever owned. After that, I bought a new '67 Opel. What a mistake; the worst car I ever owned.

I could never figure why people bought so many VWs; the Renault had them beat hands down. It was a four-door, it got better gas mileage, it had an excellent heater, and it had more weight in the rear that made it better in the snow, plus four-wheel disc brakes. The Corvette didn't even have disc brakes back in '63. It was a car ahead of its time.

Fred Dougherty

La Porte, Indiana

IN *HCC* #198 (MARCH ISSUE), IN

the article on the 1957 Cadillac Eldorado is the statement, "Packard, Peerless, and Pierce-Arrow fell...they cheapened their products to survive...". This is 100-percent incorrect, contributed in no little part in Packard's case, by its unfortunate designation for its cars.

The 120, then the 110 Packards, had and kept Packard-level quality, but were produced by mass-production techniques to be sold at a lower consumer cost to upgrade buyers of Buicks, De Sotos, and Studebakers into a similarly priced, but better-built, vehicles during a depression where few had the means to buy any new car, much less a hand-built Packard. Cadillac itself brought out the "60" aimed at 120 buyers, but it kept Cadillac quality, which was arguably lower than Packard's.

The unfortunate use by Packard of the designation "junior" for its mass-produced cars began the perception, obviously extant, that they were somehow lesser, or "cheap" Packards. The 120 and 110 saved Packard from the fate of Peerless and Pierce-Arrow, and Packard lived on into the 1950s only to be killed off, as Pat Foster has noted, by bad management decisions. To err is human, but stupidity is forever, and Packard quality could not overcome management stupidity.

Norman Higby

Menlo Park, California

PAT FOSTER'S COLUMN "A LIFETIME

of Cars" (*HCC* #198) really brought back memories of my first two cars. As a young man of 16 years, I was working as a bagger at a local supermarket, barely making a \$1.25/hour wage, when I purchased my first car for \$25 cash. It was a beautiful 1954 Nash Statesman Custom Farina. I loved that car, but, as with all teenage boys of the Sixties, I was never satisfied. I sold it (I regret it to this day) and bought a 1962 Rambler American, which I drove until I was drafted in 1969.

My father was a car nut and could make anything run, so I learned to do the same. Over the years, I have owned (or still own) 42 cars and I'm still looking. I presently own a 1938 Packard, a 1951 Hudson, a 1964 Galaxie wagon, a 1966 Studebaker Commander coupe (only 195 made), and a 1967 Ford Ranger pickup with a 429. I am now 70 years old, but I still work on cars with my friend Jason and still enjoy the thrill of driving vintage vehicles with no power steering and three-on-the-tree. I always say that the three-on-the-tree is a great anti-theft device as few know how to drive them anymore. Thanks to Pat for the trip down memory lane, and happy hunting and happy motoring.

Robert Botta

Salem, Oregon

NICE JOB ON THE TRAVEL TRAILER

article in the March issue (*HCC* #198). As a side question, why did most of the trailer companies (even today) end up in the state of Indiana? Was this a "take off" from Studebaker making wagons there?

John Zimmerman

Burlington, Wisconsin

If you have a little time and an internet connection there's a great story about the history of the RV industry in Indiana on the website my-indiana-home.com.

I AGREE WITH JERRY RAMSDALE'S

letter in the March issue. I think the 1958 Chevy Impala was one of the most beautiful cars ever, but the 1957 Chevy was an ugly duckling. I had a '57. I didn't like it and my wife hated it. The brakes faded badly, handling was poor, it sat too high, and it felt like driving a pickup truck. The only good thing I could say about it was that it had excellent gas mileage and it had a V-8 engine. I sold it and bought a '57 Mercury Turnpike Cruiser. That was a real car!

Tom Walter

Auburn, Indiana

I RECENTLY OBTAINED A COPY OF THE

March 2019 issue of *HCC* (#174), featuring Milton Stern's article on the third-generation Chevy Monte Carlo. I have owned my 1979 Monte Carlo since '87. It belonged to our son, who had just purchased it six months prior to his passing. It was his dream to fix it up and turn heads, which is what we have done in his memory. The Monte Carlo has a 5.0-liter V-8 engine with a four-barrel carburetor from the factory, bucket seats that are original, and a console with a gauge package. It also has T-tops and air conditioning. As far as I can tell, it's the original engine and we rebuilt it in 1999. Milton was right when he said that it would be the prettiest car at the cruise-ins, that no one else has. Thanks for the article. Jim and Judy Bleser

Schenectady, New York

I WAS READING YOUR MARCH ISSUE

(#198) and enjoyed the article about owners and their rides down memory lane, in the cars they once had. I also took this ride. In 1965, I was in the Army and was stationed in Fort Sill, Oklahoma. This is where I purchased my first car;

it was a 1958 Pontiac convertible — a Bonneville Chieftain, if I remember correctly (pictured right). I purchased it in Lawton, for about \$800 or \$900. I got a loan through the base credit union. It's the car I learned to get my driver's license with; I had a buddy that helped me achieve that goal.

My mother and father came to visit me at Fort Sill. I took them around the area, and Lawton, up Mount Scott, which was behind the base, and the wildlife refuge nearby. The Army decided to ship me to Korea in 1964, so before I was scheduled to travel, I drove my car from the base to Barrackville, West Virginia, before most of the interstate highways were built. After my tour with the Army, I got a job and the Pontiac wasn't as practical, so I traded it in. To this day I think of that car and the memories of driving it.

Richard Smedley

Barrackville, West Virginia

I ENJOYED PAT FOSTER'S ARTICLE

on vintage campers in the March issue (#198). It was very interesting and enlightening. My camping progressed from a two-man pup tent to a Sears soft-top pop-up, to hardtop pop-ups. Now, in my advanced age, we have a 27-foot trailer with a 13-foot slide out. It is pulled by a 2006 Chevy 6.6-liter diesel.

One of those pop-ups was a Skamper. It seems to me that it sported a paint design similar to the one you couldn't identify. Even if my memory is close, I don't know that Skamper ever made a travel trailer as shown.

Shortly after reading the feature, I accidentally came across an article on the Covered Wagon Company that appeared in the July/August 2017 issue of *Michigan History* magazine. The article enhanced your information on the rise and fall of the Covered Wagon Company. It also answered the question of the company's demise, which began — in part — with a fall in market share, due to competition and a labor strike in February 1940. Military contracts during World War II kept the company in business, but thinking the postwar consumer market was an uncertain gamble, the company sold its factory in September '45.

Douglas Trembath

Sears, Michigan

I RECENTLY RECEIVED THE MARCH

issue and Pat Foster's column, "A Lifetime of Cars," got my attention, so I just had to write. You see, I, too, have had 42-ish driven, licensed, and insured cars. About half of what I have owned I started to





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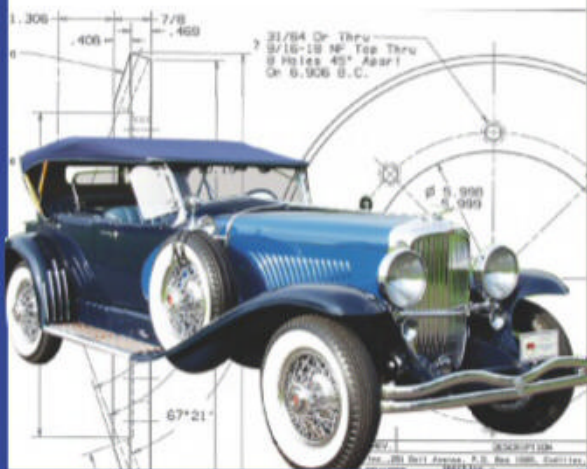
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RECAPS LETTERS

purchase around 1972, so I figure we're about the same age, or thereabouts.

I, too, owned a 1962 Rambler American, but mine was a convertible. I also owned a Volkswagen, but mine was a 1965 Beetle; I also blew the engine. Another I owned was a 1965 Pontiac Le Mans, but it was a 326/four-speed convertible and it smoked like hell. I also owned a 1962 Mercury Comet two-door that I left in a ditch. The 1965 Ford Mustang that I owned donated its 200-cu.in. engine to a '65 Comet four-door. Lastly, I bought a 1965 Chevy SS convertible. Out of my first 13 cars, eight were from different manufacturers.

A. Twedt

Elmira, New York

THIS IS IN RESPONSE TO TERRY

McGean's column, "The Magic Inside," (HCC #199). I enjoyed his reference to automotive interiors, but for myself I must turn the clock back a few years. Back in 1958, Chevy made a big deal about tri-colored interiors; later, Pontiac really hit a home run with them in the early '60s, with the division's combination of leather and vinyl upholstery. The door panels and padded dashboards added a lot also. Then I remember when I first saw, in 1978, GM's "funeral home" interiors of cut velour and pillow-top seats. Give me leather any day. Phil Aubrey
Merlin, Oregon

I THOUGHT A GOOD FOLLOW-UP TO the vintage trailer piece in the March issue (HCC #198) would be to send you a picture of my 1954 Mercury "Tin Woody," with a matching vintage trailer that my neighbor restored. Truly classic! And the Merc could easily pull the rig with its then-new Y-block V-8.

I get both *HCC* and *Hemmings Motor News* monthly and read every page, every month.

I really appreciate the attention to detail and the quality of the language in the articles and editorials. And the humor that only we motorheads will appreciate.

You guys have managed to hold my interest since I used to read the magazines through my dad, Robert Miles (he runs ads under Miles Auto Parts), starting back in the late '60s. Dad recently sent me a copy of the November 1968 *Hemmings Motor News*: No editorial. No articles. Only ads!

Well, this May Robert Miles turns 90; I'm 65 in June. He is down to one car: a 1970 Buick Electra 225 convertible. I'm up to three: A 1954 Merc, a 1964 Corvette roadster, and a 1966 Chrysler Newport convertible. I'm a return-to-original guy, so all my cars are bone-stock drivers. Just like the old days.

Cheers to you guys up in Vermont; I'm in sunny California where we keep the top down in our garages at all times for the next drive.

Here's to driving our old cars and sharing the joy!

Jim Miles

Via email

JEFF KOCH'S "DRESSED FOR

Success" article in the February issue (#197) focused on the 1957 De Soto Adventurer, which is one of my favorite cars from the Fifties. I have always thought that the De Soto Fireflite and Adventurer, as well as the 1957 Chrysler 300, were the ultimate car designs of that period. I believe they were very beautiful, dignified, and uncluttered designs. I build many car models, and in 2014, my De Soto appreciation led me to build a 1:25-scale hardtop model in the very same interior





and exterior colors depicted on the car in the article. I liked it so much that in 2016 I built a model convertible with the same interior, but with reverse gold exterior and a black Flite-Sweep accent. These were built using the fantastic Modelhaus hardtop kits, which are no longer available due to the retirement of the company owners.

I actually owned a De Soto as a 17-year-old, in 1960. I bought what was then (and really is now) a rare 1953 Fire-dome convertible with a 276-cu.in., 160-hp Hemi V-8 and Tip-Toe shift. The car was originally yellow with a black top. After a friend wrecked the car, I had it repaired, painted it red, lowered it, and installed a white top and a rolled-and-pleated pure white Naugahyde interior with gray and black accents. I learned a lesson from this: Never put a pure white interior in a convertible. The top-down glare made driving in bright sunlight very difficult. In my many years, I have never seen another 1953 De Soto convertible. I did recently build a model of my 1953 convertible, using a sedan kit that was at the opposite end of the quality spectrum from the Modelhaus kits. It required many hours of detailing and a scratch-built interior.

Noel Wilson
St. Charles, Missouri

I AM RESPONDING TO YOUR

column in the April issue of *HCC* (#199). For as long as I can remember now, all the cars have no color to them. They are all these lifeless colors—black, dull gray, a few whites, and so on. Driving down the road yesterday, I counted six in a row like this. If it weren't so depressing it would be comical. Go to a car show like Lead East and it's just the opposite, with bright, cheerful color schemes and interiors. When and why did this happen? My friend says the Japanese cars started this off. What do you know about this happening to the consumer?

Ed Kelly
Via email

It's true that new cars have favored more subdued tones for quite some time now.

We'd be more inclined to attribute this to the German manufacturers like BMW, Mercedes, and Audi, and it probably started in the 1980s. As far as why this continued and is so prevalent today, it's all about consumer tastes. Automakers sell what people want, and the annual color trends information that comes from the major automotive paint manufacturers tells the tale. We've heard numerous times from people who buy and sell late-model used cars that silver and white are preferred over blue or red—they just sell better. So, to answer the question of why this is happening to the consumer: Because the majority of consumers seem to be choosing those colors most often. But we're with you: Brighter colors are more interesting.

I'M REREADING THE DECEMBER

issue (*HCC* #195) and wanted to respond to Jim Richardson's survey question. I was also born in 1942 and I had a 1950 Chevy Fleetline in high school. It had dual carbs, split-manifold exhaust, lakes pipes, and it was painted Adventurer Gold. About the only hobby car I've had was a 1978 Corvette Silver Anniversary model, which I sold to buy a bass boat. I have subscribed to all the Hemmings magazines for many years and really miss *Sports & Exotic Car*. I also subscribe to a number of other automotive magazines. My favorite era of cars is from about 1930 to 1950, and particularly the Thirties classics. I was born in, and still live in, southeast Kansas. I still own a hardware store and go to work every day, so I really don't have time to participate in restoring cars, but I would like to find a nice '39 Buick coupe someday. I really enjoy *HCC* and usually read Jim's column first.

Steve Sayers
Via email

Jim Richardson responds:

We made it Steve! We survived. Now we can have some fun. I, too, had a 1950 Chevy as my second car, and it was similarly equipped. Lots of fun and lots of noise. In fact, the local fuzz took exception to it. I also have a soft spot for 1939 Buick coupes. They were very nice looking, and they had smooth running inline-eights in them. In 1941, Buick added two carbs to its big engine and had the fastest passenger car that year.



To have your letter considered for Recaps, you must include your full name and the town/city and state you live in. Thank you.



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Restoration Conundrum

In October 1998, somewhere in the vast sea of Hershey vendors, I was looking at fabric samples assembled in book form by Bill Hirsch. My all-original 1952 Buick Roadmaster had seen some miles under its two prior stewards, which had caused the fabric behind each door handle to fray, while the floor carpet and driver's-seat back had seen far more glorious days. With a snippet of the car's upholstery in my hand for comparison, the debate running through my head was, "Which do I start with; what would be the easiest?"

At 26 years old, I was determined to take the next step in automotive restoration. I had replaced the brakes, fixed a power steering fluid leak—the system an option on the Roadmaster that year—and replaced a few weather seals. Upholstery seemed simple enough. Especially floor carpet. Frankly, I was a little more than proud to own, drive, and display the car—I wanted it looking its best, despite my meager budget.

As I pondered my ability against a "close enough" color match, I was asked if I needed help by—I assumed—a staff member. Instead, I found myself talking to Bill Hirsch himself. He must have taken a keen interest in the plight that I had to have exhibited. After explaining the situation, Bill asked, "Do you enjoy driving your Buick?" Yes, was my quick reply, to which he said, "Then drive it. I'd love to sell you upholstery today, but honestly, I can tell by your enthusiasm that you enjoy using the car. You're young; there will be plenty of time to restore it later when the whole car needs to be done, and we'll still be making upholstery for it. When it's ready, call me." And with that, he shook my hand, slipped me copies of the samples I had been ogling, and flashed a reassuring smile.

Nearly two dozen years have passed, and Bill's words still resonate, now more than ever. Last year, Luke—who, at the age of 15, took a sudden interest in the trio of vintage cars in or next to my garage—was instrumental in freeing my Roadmaster from its agonizing state of garage purgatory. One it had existed in since 2008.

So, this past fall, we got to work extracting the four-door sedan from its stagnant slumber. It took a fair amount of coaxing, but by midday the two-tone behemoth finally saw sunlight, after which Luke spent the next few hours detailing

both the interior and exterior. Overjoyed with the progress, we maneuvered the Buick into the rear "work bay" for the next phase of its mechanical restoration: brakes.

Even though repeated pressure on the brake pedal didn't produce a broken line and create yet another lake of hydraulic fluid, I concluded that a full inspection of the system was warranted. After all, I had not touched the brakes in 22 years, and

the dozen years of idle storage likely did little to help. Armed with the tools from my previous brake change, all Luke and I needed to do was schedule the work as not to interfere with his high school classes.

We began with the left side, securing

its necessary elevation with 3-ton-capacity jack stands, while keeping the pair of 3-ton-capacity hydraulic jacks in place as a safety net. After removing the wheels, we found the wheel cylinders to be in perfect condition, along with the cast-iron drums. Admittedly, I felt that the rear shoes had enough material riveted into place, but it seemed I would be tempting fate by not replacing the now-worn shoes. And, upon further inspection, the brake shoe retaining hardware had deteriorated, so it was off to my collection of spare parts.

Reassembly went smoothly. The trickiest part was securing the short brake shoe retaining springs; their caps have to be twisted into a locked position after sliding them over the retaining pin. More than once, each cap jettisoned into our chests after we thought they were secured. Lastly, we adjusted the distance between the new shoes and drum.

Confident in Luke's ability, I simply sat back and offered advice and the occasional hand as he disassembled, cleaned, and inspected the right side. Luke even repacked both front wheel bearings with fresh axle grease.

With the fuel system next on the to-do list, Bill's voice was asking once again, "Do you enjoy driving your Buick?" I have in the past and will likely do so again. Luke, meanwhile, is eager to experience what I did at a young age—the joy of driving an old car. Which begs the question: Is the Buick ready for a full restoration, or do we simply proceed with the mechanical resurrection and continue an old tradition? 🏠



Is the Buick

ready for a

full restoration,

or do we

simply

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...the car’s
owner
approached
me and
asked what
it was like to
drive it on
the highway.”

The Perfect Solution to the Effects of the Pandemic

As all of us are quite aware, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on the vintage car hobby. Since spring 2020, dozens of national, regional, and local events have been postponed or, in most cases, cancelled.

Last fall, when it was becoming apparent we’d lost the entire “old-car season,” a fellow car enthusiast commented that the pandemic would have an adverse effect on collector-car values since there were no shows at which to exhibit cars. And, he emphasized, many owners of vintage cars only display them at shows.

I remember staring at him, then saying, “You know, I think there are other things one can do with a vintage car, don’t you? Like drive them.”

I know some car owners are reluctant to drive a car that’s been treated to a concours-level restoration. My feeling is, once the car has received all of the awards possible, drive it and enjoy it. Some would argue that doing so would lower the value of the car. To that, all I can say is, “It’s your car. If you wish to treat it as an investment, so be it. Personally, I’d like to return it to its intended purpose.”

I know of what I speak. Many years ago, after one of my cars had received top honors at a concours d’elegance and club events, I began driving it and never looked back. A fellow car-hobby acquaintance has a saying, “The best award your car can get is a stone chip.” Obviously, he’s a serious tourer.

I didn’t become a serious driver overnight. I once owned a trailer and tow vehicle. After preparing my 1931 Lincoln for a Lincoln club event about 25 years ago, I asked the mechanic, who also transported cars, to take it from my home in Ohio to Vermont, where the meet was being held.

“Hell, you can *drive* that car there,” he said. “If you break down, I’ll come and get you!”

We drove the Lincoln round trip without a problem. When I returned home, I sold my trailer and truck. I decided that the only time I’d need special transportation was if I was going a really long distance. Since then, we’ve taken tours as long as 1,700 miles and enjoyed every mile.

Not too many years ago, I attended a regional car event to which I had driven about 40 miles.

As I pulled in, I spotted a nearly identical car. As I was parking, the car’s owner approached me and asked what it was like to drive it on the highway. I replied, “Don’t you own that car? How did you get here?”

“I trailered it,” was his reply—a distance of 30 miles it turned out. “I’m afraid something will break.”

A friend nearby overheard the conversation and couldn’t help commenting, “Man made it, man can fix it. Drive your car.”

When COVID set in in March 2020, and the events began to cancel, my wife and I created our own “car events”—trips to arboretums and parks or a picnic with other car buffs (with social distancing and masks). That will likely continue well into 2021.

What can happen during a spontaneous road trip? I’ll share

this wonderful example: Last fall, near the end of our driving season in the Midwest, I drove my 1936 Cord Beverly to an orchard in Ohio’s Amish country. My wife wanted some apples and a few other items. While she did her shopping in the store, I waited in the car. Up to the Cord walked an Amish gentleman. His buggy and horse were parked nearby. (For those not familiar with the Amish, they are a conservative religious community that is detached from “the English world,” which includes automobiles.) Standing there in his traditional clothes, he had studied the car for several minutes before walking towards me sitting in the driver’s seat.

“Is that what I think it is?” he asked.

“What do you *think* it is?” I replied.

“I think that’s a Cord,” he said. He then mentioned some of the car’s unique features.

Curious, but not wishing to come off the wrong way, I had to ask him how he knew all of this.

His answer was simple enough. “I like cars, especially cars like this. I read about them.”

After chatting for a few minutes, I got out and opened the hood so he could see the engine and transmission. Then, it was time to leave. As we drove home, my wife said I was smiling and shaking my head. Well, why wouldn’t I? It’s not every day one meets an Amish man who can spot a Cord. 🚗



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CELESTIAL BODY

*How a 1958 Buick Century Caballero became
an AACA Zenith Award winner — Part 1*

BY MARK J. McCOURT • PHOTOGRAPHY BY BARRY KLUCZYK • RESTORATION IMAGES COURTESY OF JOE TONNETTO



There's something to be said for that old proverb, "the best things in life are free." While it's supposed to refer to intangibles like cherished relationships with family and friends, those "best things" can sometimes also be long-admired objects, like a classic 1950s station wagon in need of rescue. The 1958 Buick Century Caballero on these pages did indeed change hands with no exchange of money, but it would take incredible investments of dedication, time, talent, and yes, dollars, to be transformed into the condition you see here. This rare Estate Wagon would be plucked from the desert and reborn into a concours winner, ultimately achieving the Antique Automobile Club of America's highest honor.

The story starts, like many do these days, with a bit of harmless internet surfing, which would lead into perhaps the ultimate example of right place, right time. "I was recovering from arthroscopic knee surgery at home in June 2014, wasting time looking at car stuff," explains Troy, Michigan, resident Joe Tonietto. "I saw a thread on stationwagonforums.com with the headline, 'Suggestions? A free '58 Buick Caballero.'"

For the uninitiated, the Caballero was Buick's—and indeed, General Motors'—top-of-the-line station wagon in 1958, a year when the "B-58" family included Limited, Roadmaster, Super, Century, and Special ranges. As befitting this GM division's penultimate status, its six-passenger Special Estate Wagon could be



The Caballero was carefully prepared for interstate shipment to Michigan by strapping the rear axle in place, removing the bumpers and associated trim for safekeeping, and securing the tailgate, which contained a near-irreplaceable piece of glass.



Careful measurements of panel gaps were taken before the front sheetmetal was disassembled. Those measurements wouldn't prove as useful as hoped, but the metal ended up being in great shape. Five bolts secured the front inner sheetmetal assembly.



The 364-cu.in. "nailhead" was covered in oil and desert dust, and came out after a hidden transmission shift linkage bracket was found and freed. The V-8 would be transferred to an old welding cart for support so its condition could safely be evaluated.



had with the airy, B-pillarless "Riviera" hardtop styling that was mandatory on the premium, highly trimmed Century Caballero, the focus of this story. Also standard in this Arlington, Texas-assembled, \$4,290 (around \$39,042 in today's dollars) wagon were a four-barrel-carbureted, 300-horsepower, 364-cu.in. V-8 and a Dynaflow automatic transmission.

But that last element was no longer present in the free Buick that Joe found online. The car was located in New Mexico, and was being offered by the friend of a work colleague of the poster; it was believed to have remained in single-family ownership from new, and was soon slated to be scrapped. Joe saw an opportunity to pick up a vehicle he'd long admired, and pounced.

"I responded immediately, and mine was the first reply. The surgery didn't have me disabled—I was mobile—so I booked a flight out there," he says.

"I've always liked station wagons, and have owned several of them, even before they became so popular. I have wanted to own one of the 1957-'58 Buick or Oldsmobile hardtop wagons ever since seeing my first Oldsmobile Fiesta wagon at a local event many years ago—I thought they were so cool-looking. Seeing Steve Plunkett's 1958 Caballero at the 2014 EyesOn Design exhibition further fueled my interest in these cars. They are hard to find, and I have watched them sell at auction for prices I couldn't afford. I never thought I would find one of my own."

Joe had reached out to Bill Karpee, the forum member who'd posted the initial alert about the Buick's availability and who was relatively local to the car. "Bill met me at the airport with a sign that read 'Joe Buick,' he recalls. "We drove up to Santa Fe the next morning to look at the car. As soon I got a good look at it, I knew I was going to take it—it would be my next project."



This Buick's ready availability was publicized in an online forum by Bill Karpee. He and his son Anthony helped facilitate the wagon's removal, as well as preparing it for shipment to Michigan.



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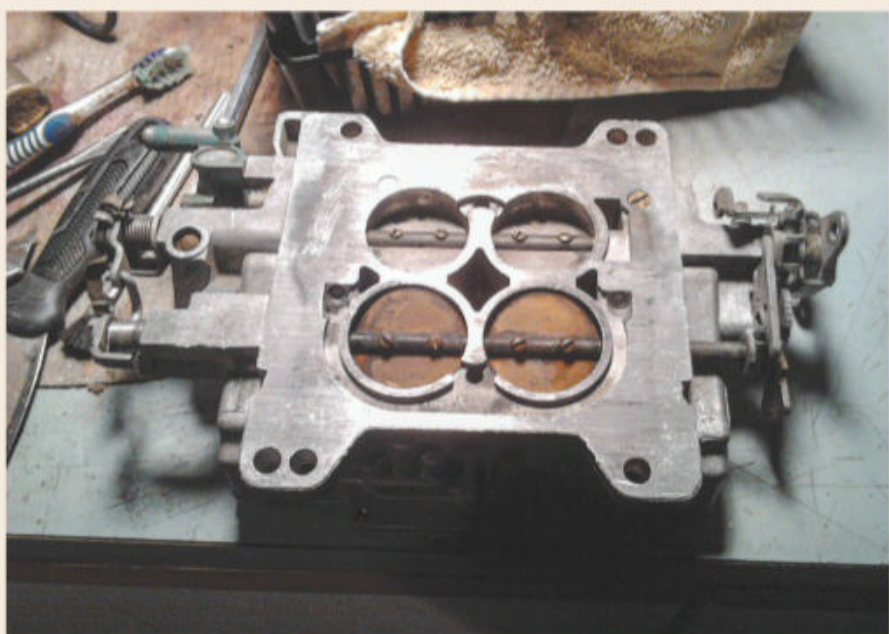
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The V-8 only allowed around 90-degrees of crank rotation by hand, and it wasn't until the heads were removed that serious rust in the number eight cylinder was discovered. After this was removed with a soft wire brush and Marvel Mystery Oil, it turned freely.



As found, the Rochester four-barrel was filled with dirt. After 25 minutes in an ultrasonic cleaning tank filled with hot water and Pine Sol, it was visibly improved; a bit of varnish remained in the bottom of the float bowls that was removed in the rebuild.



The engine was rebuilt to factory specifications after the block was bored .030 to eliminate rust damage and new forged aluminum pistons were installed. The heads proved solid and reusable. The correct diameter oil galley plugs had to be found, and new rocker shaft assemblies were installed.



AACA

The AACA Zenith Awards

FOR THE PAST FOUR YEARS, THE ANTIQUE AUTOMOBILE CLUB OF America has presented the Zenith Awards, and the 2020 winner—selected from a group of 10 finalists—was the 1958 Buick Caballero on these pages. This represents the first time a postwar vehicle has won the AACA's highest prize. National Director Tom Cox proposed the honor with this in mind: "We envisioned the Zenith awards as long overdue recognition for those who really go above and beyond to produce exceptional quality, accurate restorations. Each of the vehicles chosen has achieved near-perfect scores in the AACA judging system. The Zenith program takes us one step beyond our point system and looks at the quality of the work, difficulty, and other more subjective aspects of restoration. It's extremely difficult to select the contenders, and even more difficult to crown the winner—however, each and every car competing is already a winner." AACA CEO Steve Moskowitz adds, "This past year, Joe Tonietto's Buick was a very popular choice as it was not only a magnificent restoration, but one that was difficult. The entire judging team was amazed that someone would go to the lengths to restore a rare station wagon to the exacting standards Joe set for himself."

This ambitious go-getter is a car enthusiast to the core, being a Kettering University (then, General Motors Institute of Technology) graduate whose career in the automotive industry included more than 20 years of experience in engineering and manufacturing roles with GM of Canada, Fisher Body, and Delphi. In addition to his longstanding soft spot for station wagons, Joe admits to being a lifelong Pontiac guy, having owned and restored numerous Firebirds and GTOs. His current fleet includes two 1933 Pontiac project cars and a '68 GTO coupe.

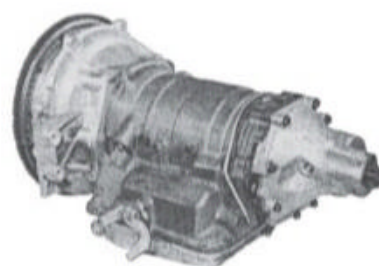
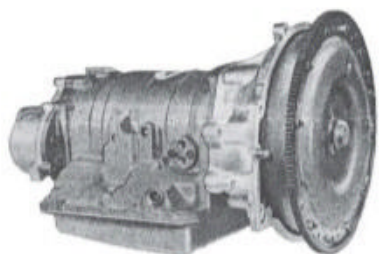
And he's no stranger to restorations, having first tried his hand at a basket-case 1957 Corvette in the early 1980s. "Knowing now what I didn't know then, I would have done a lot of things differently on that car, but it turned out pretty good for an amateur restoration at that time," Joe admits with a smile. "I have done different levels of restoration on subsequent cars, including a 1968 GTO that turned out to be a national concours winner. I kept that for three years before selling it because I was afraid to drive it." So, our feature car owner had the skill to complete a restoration to the most exacting standards, but that wasn't his initial goal for this southwestern relic, which offered some surprises.

As Joe found the Buick, it had last been registered in 1972, and was later used as a desert adventure vehicle before being abandoned in 1990. "After it was done driving on the road, it had obviously been used to go rock-hopping in the back country. There were some big dents in the rocker panels and floorpans, and even a spot on the frame where they'd rolled it over a large rock and creased one of the C-channel crossmember pieces. Somebody really had some fun with that thing out in the hills," he recalls.

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Using factory-correct finishes on every single component was a key goal during this restoration, and Joe's attention to detail under the hood, as well as in chassis areas normally not seen, earned him the Zenith.

"It was solid and fairly complete save for the transmission, and the only surviving, unbroken piece of glass was in the liftgate," Joe continues. "The rear bumper end caps, which often fall prey to rust, were intact and rust-free, though a little banged up. All the stainless steel and chrome trim parts were there but needed to be repaired, replated, or polished. The interior was typical of a desert car: crispy vinyl remnants and sunburnt plastic components. The remaining exterior paint brushed off like dust."

So, despite the Caballero's needs, its more-than-half-century life in a dry climate had made it an ideal restoration candidate, and he set out to ready it for transport to the state where its Mitchell-Bentley Ionia body originated. "Working in that guy's backyard in 100-degree heat, Bill and his son Anthony helped me get it up on wheels, put tubes in the tires, and get it rolling off the property so we could have it towed to Bill's neighborhood in Albuquerque, where a hauler could pick it up. They were a great help," Joe tells us. "And when I got it home, I had the 'Oh my God, what have I done?!' moment."

When Bill first publicized the Buick's availability, he'd suggested that it might be a good candidate for restomodding, if a new owner couldn't undertake a full, correct restoration. Joe reveals he had a similar thought: "Initially, I planned only to make it safe and drivable. I thought I'd get it running; replace the transmission, torque tube, and rear axle driveline with a more current, open driveline with overdrive transmission; and I'd drive it as an ugly-looking survivor with tremendous desert patina."

"One of my friends is Werner Meier, Corvette Hall of Famer and founder of Masterworks Automotive Services. He looked at it when it first came off the trailer," Joe continues. "First, he told me I'm crazy. Then he did some poking around, and said, 'You're going to have to do so much to make it roadworthy, you might as well just do it right.' I thought about that for a long time. The Caballero had great bones, and I found out the original paint color was Garnet Red, my favorite on these cars. I went a long way into this before I decided, yeah, I'll do a full restoration. I figured that, given the market, there was a chance to get it done and not be way underwater on it."

As is often the case with vehicles having limited new-parts support, the procurement of a parts car would help Joe with his missing Dynaflo and more. As he shares, the one he found proved a lucky break: "My friend Pat O'Malley, in Chatham, Ontario (Canada), knew that Steve Plunkett hadn't scrapped

what was left of his parts car yet. It had the correct transmission, as well as some small suspension and steering column pieces that were either broken or missing on my car, and some exterior trim pieces that would replace damaged ones on my car. That parts car also had the rare, optional two-thirds/one-third split-folding back seat."

The process of disassembling the Buick in his home garage would offer several surprises, both positive and negative. In the plus categories were the overall solid condition of the body sheetmetal and the fact that the "6B" V-8 under the hood was numbers-matching original to the car. The negatives included the internal condition of that engine, and discoveries of hidden undercarriage damage that would require extra steps to remedy.

On these pages, we've seen how the Caballero seemed to have weathered its time and treatment with resolute solidity. It's true that, compared to a car from the Midwest or Northeast, our feature Buick would need minimal rust repair, but that underplays the incredible amount of time-consuming detailed work this wagon would absorb over the next five years, culminating in its history-making award.

Tune back in next month for Part II. 🏁



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F is for Forced Induction

Restoring this supercharged 1957 Ford Thunderbird was a personal quest for perfection — Part 2

BY DAVID CONWILL • PHOTOGRAPHY BY DINO PETROCELLI • RESTORATION PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY DON ANTILLA

Last month, we introduced you to this 1957 Ford Thunderbird and the relentless pursuit of perfection by its owner, Don Antilla, of Southbury, Connecticut. When we left off, Don had perfected his plan for restoring the car and finally dove into the hands-on portion of the project. The car was carefully disassembled and thoroughly cleaned before major components, like the body and frame, were sent off for media blasting.

With the body and frame down to clean metal, both components began recovery from their history, first as a hot rod with a Corvette engine and then as a neglected quasi-hulk. The frame was smoothed out with judicious applications of polyester filler paste and painted the correct gloss black. The proper sheen

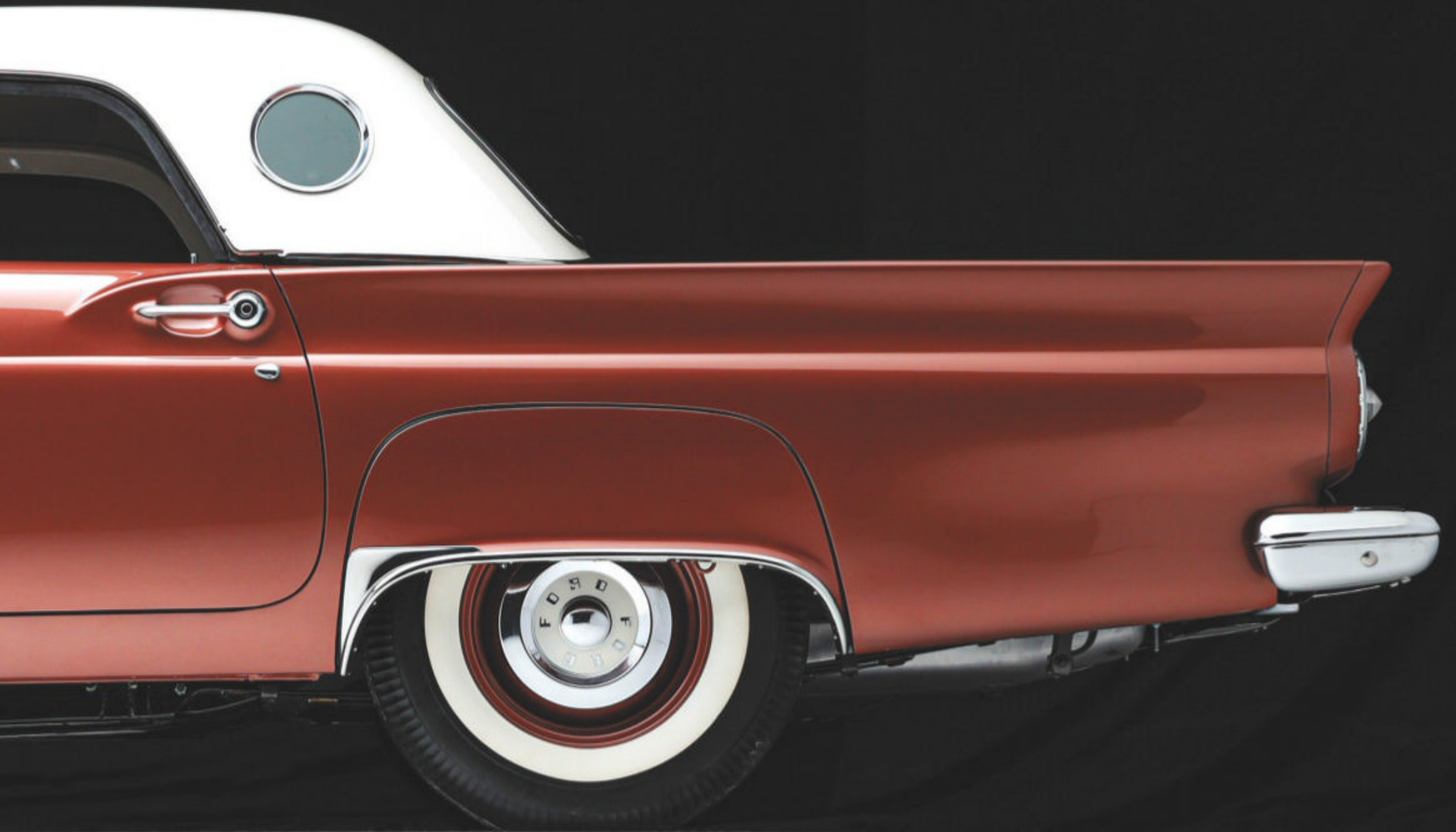
for the chassis was one of the earliest hurdles the project had to clear.

“Extreme deliberation on every single part,” is how Don sums up this project, “whether you can see it or not.” The frame was included in that. Surviving original cars tend to exhibit a semigloss finish, but it seems that’s because the glossy paint applied by Ford quickly faded.

Similarly, Don wanted the pieces attached to the frame to have the proper finishes—including things like bare castings and cadmium plating. To preserve the natural metal finish of items like the pitman arm and steering box, Don applied Rust Prevention Magic. The RPM was field tested by applying it to the T-85 three-speed, which was then left out over the winter to see how it held up.

Midcentury industrial plating is one of those seemingly commonplace items that has virtually ceased to exist on any level accessible to the hobbyist. Responsibly disposing of plating chemicals isn’t cheap, so there are few shops doing that kind of work on a small scale. One of these is Tru6 Restoration & Design, in Boston, Massachusetts, a shop best known for its work on pricey exotics.

This is where Don’s can-do attitude and realism about industrial matters came into play. He’s retired now, but used to work for helicopter builder Sikorsky Aircraft, so he understands things like economies of scale and how to talk minimum production runs and price. He also, as we established last month, does his homework when it comes to matters of authenticity.



When Don approached Tru6 about his Thunderbird, the company had never worked on a domestic automotive project before. His preparedness and pragmatism impressed the plater and he was taken on as a client. From the hood brace to the Dial-O-Matic seat tracks, many parts of the Thunderbird ultimately benefitted from that relationship.

Don's primary guide in restoration matters were the rules for judging published by the Classic Thunderbird Club International, but he didn't stop there. Generally speaking, the underside of the car is exempt from judging and it's an area where shortcuts would be easy to take, but when it came to matters like the proper shape of his brake-line clips or whether his stencils were actually just decals, Don didn't slack off.

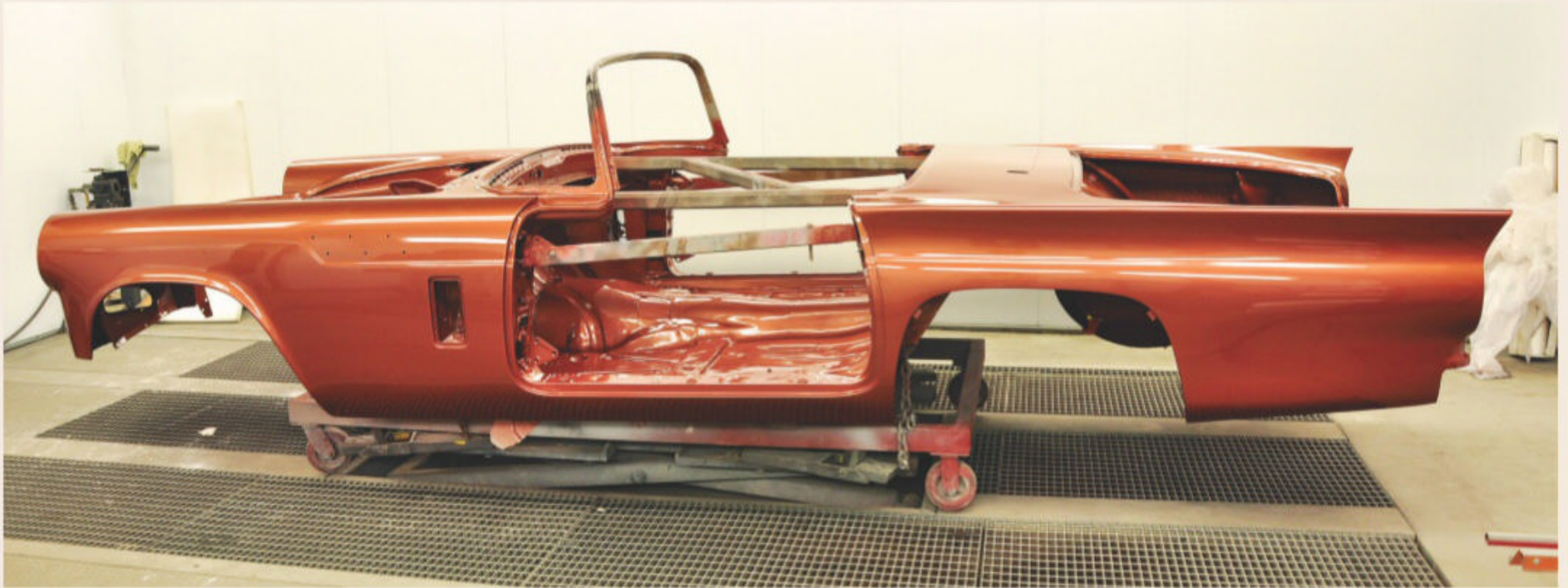
Don's research into preserved original cars had revealed that the driveshaft U-joints were surrounded by straps. But why, he wondered?

"Because it was prepared as an assembly," Don says. Even in places where he didn't necessarily know the reason why a thing was done, he picked up on patterns. For instance, he discovered traces of red paint on multiple driveshafts. "I figured that made it correct," he says.

A similar challenge existed with the paint color. Thunderbird Bronze wasn't a widespread choice among Thunderbird buyers. The paint formula hasn't survived in any reliable way, which leads restorers in pursuit of absolute authenticity to go their own way in replicating it. Don's approach was to enlist the help of his nephew, Michael Antilla.

Michael is a crack painter and before the body was stripped, he found several areas where the factory paint had been preserved and protected—both inside the doors and on the backside of some small trim pieces. He electronically scanned the color and used that as a basis to start mixing up batches of paint. Through some trial and error, plus consultation with the experts Don has befriended over the years, they came up with what everyone seems to agree is a proper rendition of the original color, but in a basecoat/clearcoat.

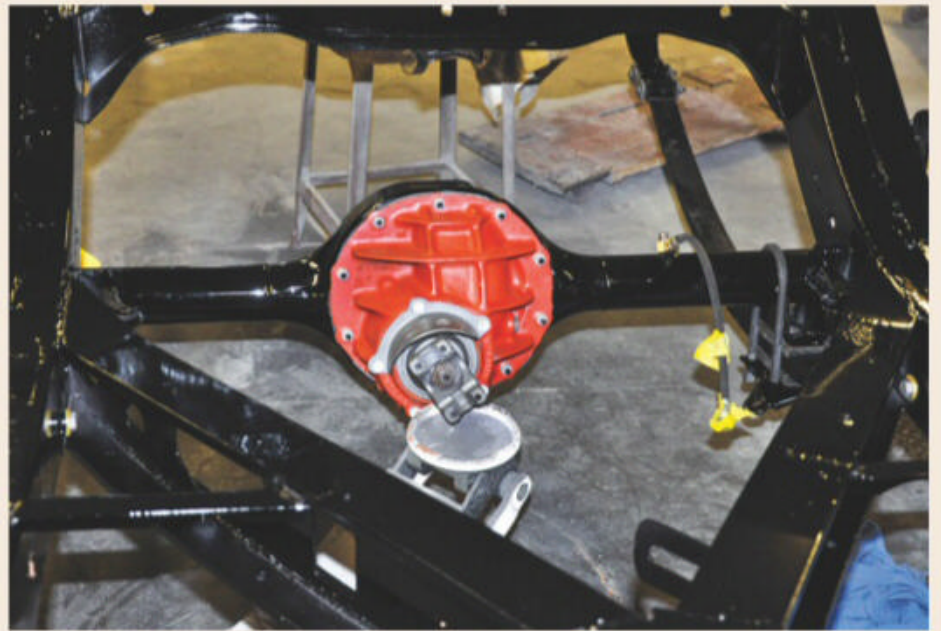
Glass was another sticking point in the restoration. It's rather easy to get a nice reproduction windshield for a 1957 Thunderbird, but the trouble is that most sport prominent modern markings on them, as required by law. Don was



Don's nephew, Michael Antilla, helped develop the paint formula by taking samples of the preserved original Thunderbird Bronze for paint analysis. Michael was also, in Don's words, "the genius who did the actual painting" using a basecoat/clearcoat.



Don took considerable pains to obtain the proper level of gloss on the frame. He was equally conscientious when it came to the finishes of the fuel lines and steering and suspension pieces, including cadmium plating from Tru6 where appropriate.



Note the unpainted surfaces of the restored and reinstalled rear differential carrier. Ford primed the entire casting before machining. "A subtlety," Don notes, "is that most rear ends had copper sealing washers only up to the level where the lube might have risen to."



The body shims were restored via acid dipping, washing, heating, and gray-phosphate coating (Parkerizing). Reinstalling them in the same locations from which they were removed meant body and door gaps were spot on, with virtually no adjustment required.

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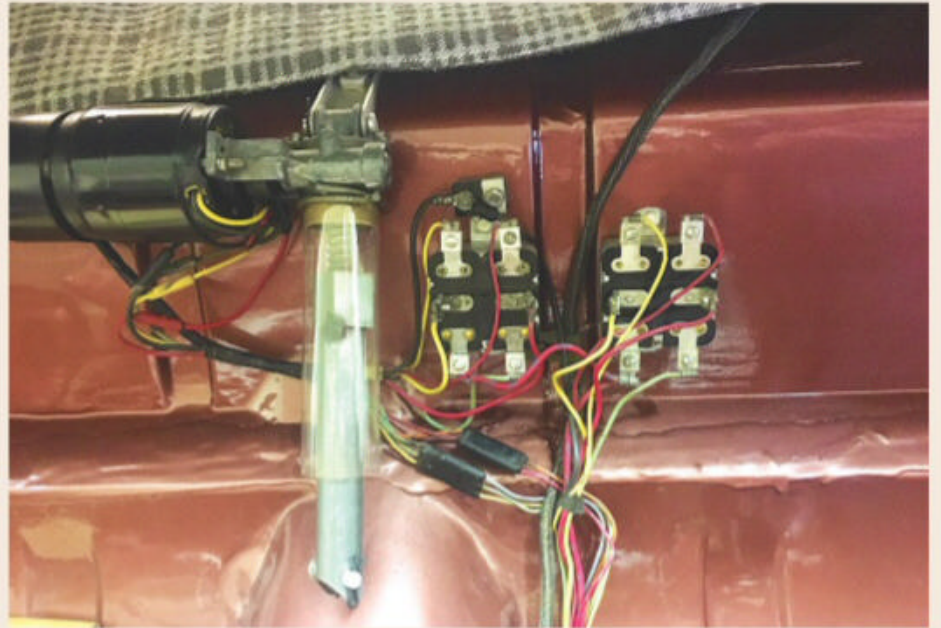
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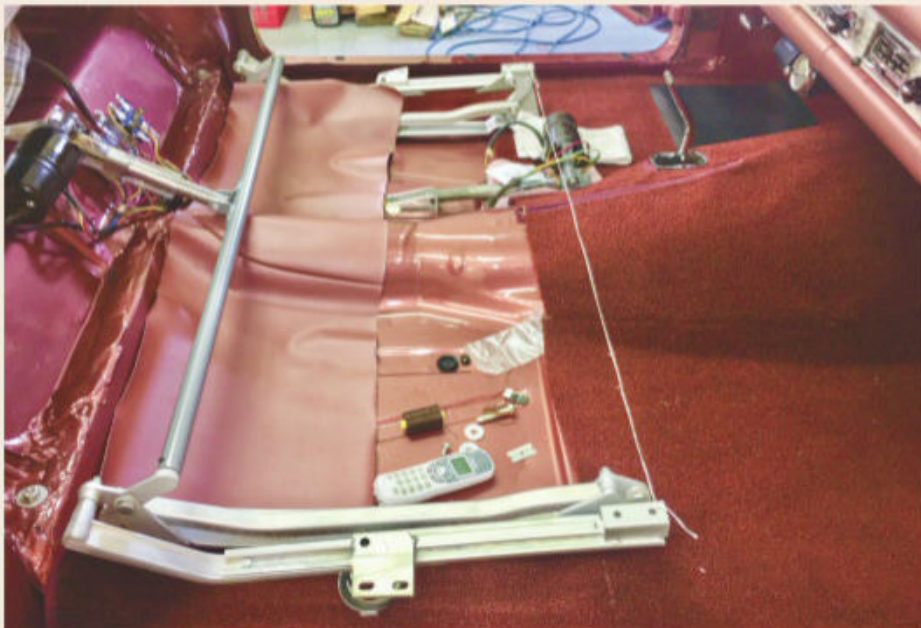
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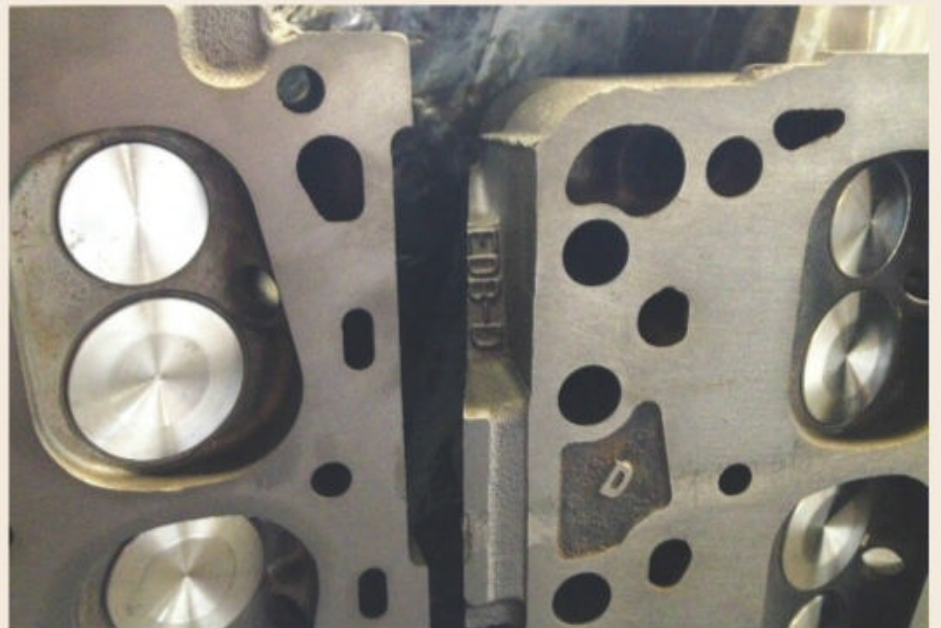
That is real Ford aluminum trim. Don explains: "My judge friends advised me that the repros have a few subtleties that an astute judge can see." This is the second car Don's restored with this trim — he removed it before putting the other one up for sale.



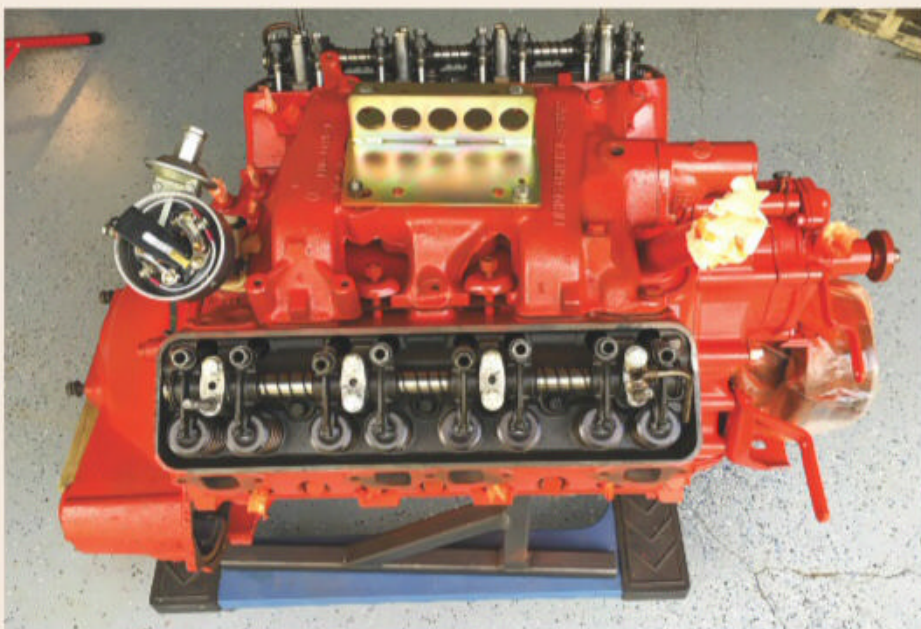
These are the relays controlling the optional Dial-O-Matic power seat. Adjusting the seat is "a delicate process." Don explains, "Do it wrong and you are likely to hit a limit stop and burn out the rare drive motor."



This view shows the Dial-O-Matic motors and brackets during adjustment. Also, look closely at the carpet stitching. Reproduction carpet is one piece, but the factory hand-sewed the extension on. Don replicated the stitching using extra-heavy twine.



Replicating the original engine included tracking down the proper cylinder heads. Supercharger heads have a unique combustion chamber. Don got these from an old NASCAR driver. They were ported "way back when," and have unknown numbers stamped on them.



The engine shows off its dual-point distributor (another F-code specific piece) and its carefully applied paint. The finish went on in thin coats, so as not to bury the casting grain. Don also replicated the painted-all-apiece look of a factory engine.



Dyno tested at Don Scinto Automotive in Stratford, Connecticut, the blueprinted 312 pumped out just short of 240 horsepower. That number was achieved without the supercharger and associated carburetor, which added too much plumbing. Add in 5-6 psi of boost and 300 hp is believable.

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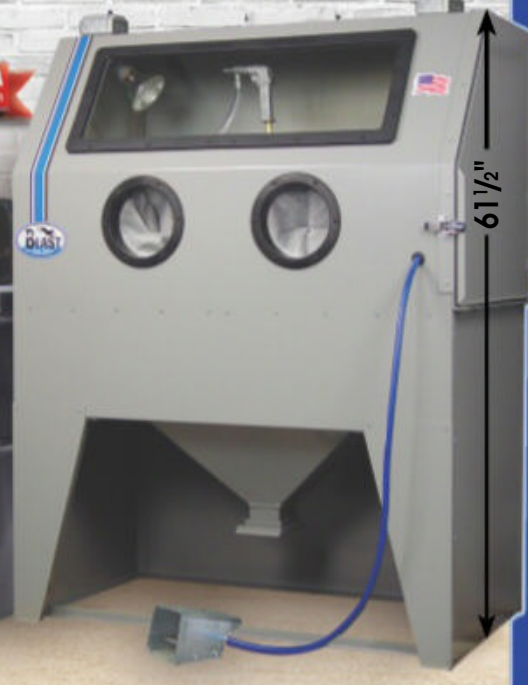
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Especially under the hood or in the cockpit, it's the details that really make any restoration. No matter how small, there's absolutely nothing lacking in Don's Thunderbird. New old stock parts were used wherever they could be located (like the dash trim and parts of the supercharger system) and top-quality reproductions were sourced or manufactured where required (like the valve-cover decals).

able to arrange the purchase of a windshield with the markings located so that, when installed, they were hidden behind the weatherstripping. Then it was left to Don to apply the correct original markings via acid etching, a task that required some nerve: Stop the process too soon, and it won't look right; wait too long, and you might ruin the windshield.

While the engine is the star of the show in an F-code Thunderbird, it was relatively straightforward to put together a supercharged 312. Don knows the correct supercharger equipment and had accumulated virtually all of the proper "Phase 2" (late 1957) pieces before restoration started. He even tracked down

some things that everyone seems to have forgotten — like the rubber washer at the top of the carburetor bonnet, which he found in the collection of an old drag racer, still new in the Ford box.

Noteworthy aspects of recreating the F-code engine included the cylinder heads. Ford specified larger-chamber heads for the supercharged engines, so as not to force combustion pressures too high and induce preignition. Those heads have understandably gotten hard to find, but Don tracked down a pair in the collection of a NASCAR driver, and they turned out to have been treated to a nice-looking porting job at some point in history.

The valve covers probably surprise some people, as they're stamped-steel units with decals rather than the commonly seen cast-aluminum versions. Don says that only one F-code car actually received aluminum valve covers. Thus, it was important that this car have the right ones, but the problem is that the widely available reproduction decals aren't totally correct.

Don's solution to the decal issue was to collect as many examples of original decals as he could find, and then retain an illustrator to get the art correct. After a whole year and 15 different revisions, a new decal was printed using heat-resistant materials. The heat



resistance is important because on the originals, the silver elements turned gold after a few years.

Less glamorous, but equally important to authenticity, Don also had a friend create silk-screening fixtures for the heater hoses. Factory hoses were striped, and reproduction hoses are not. After some experimentation, Don was able to come up with the proper enamel paint to create original-looking hoses.

Perhaps the most impressive efforts were made in the interior. The turned-aluminum dash trim is an especially prized piece that Don has had for many years. Reproduction trim is available, but differs slightly from factory pieces. Luckily, Don had acquired the trim in this car as an NOS part. He had used it on a previous restoration, but before he put that car on the market, he swapped it out for something nearly as nice — simply because he knew he wanted the perfect trim for his magnum opus.

One of the more fascinating tasks inside involved restoration of Ford's Dial-O-Matic adjustable seat. Electric motors and relays, in a system reminiscent of the elaborate retractable hardtop on the Ford Skyliner, work in unison to provide



multiple adjustments for driver comfort. The system was never designed to be taken apart, however, and if it is improperly adjusted it can burn up the rare and expensive motors.

Don painstakingly ground off all the tabs of the Dial-O-Matic system, repaired any damage, had the original finishes reproduced, and then reassembled and adjusted it. The result is

a seat that functions like new.

Stories like these exist throughout this car in too great a volume to ever fully retell. That pursuit of perfection never stops, either. On reviewing the results of this photo shoot, Don noticed that the angle of the front bumper isn't exactly how he'd like it. When we last spoke, he was already manufacturing a corrected bracket to address it. 🛠️

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DATSUN SAVES

Saves gas, sure. But this 1975 Datsun 610 earned itself a full restoration by delivering its owner from evil

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KOCH

When the American arm of Nissan launched its “Datsun Saves!” ad campaign at around the same time as the Middle East stuck a cork in its oil spigots in late ‘73, we’re pretty sure the company meant that its cheap-to-buy and cheap-to-run vehicles saved fuel and other natural resources. But life itself?



Datsun 610

in the collector-car world, the Datsun 610 isn't on most top-10 (20? 40?) lists of vintage Japanese cars to lust after, pick up on the cheap, and fix up. In a list of favorite '70s Datsuns, the ranks would be dominated by Z-cars and the 510 — sold as the Bluebird in Japan — but the ZX and pickups would also make the list. Fans who keep their eye on Nissans that never made it to the States would surely also look toward a few generations of Skyline. But the 610?

Yet the 610 was the car that pointed Datsun forward in this country. Until its arrival in the fall of 1972, Datsun enjoyed a cheap-and-cheerful approach, its cars solidly built and achieving a cult reputation through motorsports. Witness the brand's success on the world stage with its succession of rally cars, and on America's road-racing circuits with Peter Brock's team winning races on the West Coast and Bob Sharp grabbing laurels for Datsun in the East. But in 1972, high performance was coming to a screeching halt in this country: Emissions controls meant lower compression ratios and an array of tacked-on smog gear to help clean the air, while bumper laws would soon add weight and ungainly lines to the ends of every car sold Stateside. In an American car that depended largely on torque to shuffle around town, the power drain was less noticeable, but in smaller-engined cars, which needed to rev to maximize their power, the dream of performance got more difficult with each dropped compression point and every additional pound added as the '70s rolled on.

Sensing a sea change, Datsun sent this car, dubbed 610, to replace the boxy little 510. Both models were sold as Nissan Bluebirds in Japan; the 610 was known in its homeland as the Bluebird-U, a name meant to put emphasis on personalization and comfort. Fully reclining front bucket seats, pleated vinyl upholstery, center console, tinted glass, carpeting, a clock, whitewall tires, power front disc brakes, and fully independent suspension (on coupe and sedan, but not the wagon) all helped underscore Datsun's marketing push in print ads and 30-second TV spots: The 610 was a *luxury-economy car*. The 610 was only marginally larger than the 510 it replaced — 3 inches of wheelbase, 1 inch of track, less than 100 pounds on the scale — but the emphasis had clearly shifted from economy-with-a-side-of-spunk to something a little calmer, and more in keeping with the times. (Surely the quantity of rubber biscuits and bushings helped soften things up a bit also.) The Bluebird, you could say, was spreading its wings.

The earliest 610s used a 1,770-cc version of Datsun's L-series OHC four-cylinder, while models from 1974 to the 610's 1976 demise received a 2-liter engine to help cope with new bumpers (for 1975) that added more than 200 pounds to the far ends of the body. Despite Nissan (and the world) focusing on luxury over performance, the 610 fared admirably in the world of competition: It won its class, and took second overall, in the 1973 East Africa Safari rally. In American road racing, it replaced the 510. Bob Sharp took a 610 to second place in the SCCA B-Sedan championship in 1973 and '74, and in 1976 Elliott Forbes-Robinson piloted a 610 to the SCCA B-Sedan Production championship.

Ask Bryan Thompson. "That car saved my life," he tells us. Now residing in West Hollywood, California, in 1998, Bryan was matriculating at the College of Creative Studies in Detroit. "One day I got mugged in a Detroit suburb, and was chased back to my car by some big dude trying to take my money. I jumped in, and I said, 'Robes Pierre [the name he bestowed upon his Datsun 610], if you start and get me out of here, I'll give you a full restoration when I can afford it.' The window was down; the mugger reached in and grabbed me as I was sitting in the car. And for the first time ever, I turned the key and that Datsun started immediately. I took off, with his arm caught on the pillar, and eventually he spun around and fell down. And I thought, 'That's it! You're getting a full restoration.'"

A Datsun 610 was a curious choice for a car then; even now, in the middle of a full-fledged vintage Japanese-car boom



Yet as much as the rock-solid mechanicals were a selling point, the style helped ingratiate Datsun to middle America. *Car and Driver* described the 610 as a “stylistic blending of Toyota Corolla and Dodge Charger,” a comparison that Bryan, now an auto designer by trade, both sees and embraces. “Cars like the 610 had no cultural value [at the time], and no one understood why I liked them. But the Japanese modelers were so capable of these delicate and sophisticated surfaces,” Bryan explains. “But that’s what attracted me to cars—to break a car down into its design elements and analyze the execution of those elements. I was always fascinated with Japan’s interpretation of American muscle car design translated into Japanese economy-car proportions. The 610 is basically a [’71] Dodge Charger, but the proportions changed, and it became something new. The Japanese at the time would have seen it as a form of flattery. In emulation, they came up with their own aesthetic.”



“Nissan designers were inspired by America. Look at America’s fuel-crisis era of design: constricted by federal regulations, designers just added stuff. Nissan looked at things and said, let’s design for the American market where they’re adding luxury touches like landau roofs, animal-grain vinyl, and filigree. But Nissan also looked to add fuel economy—all in a more reliable and economical package.”

So when Bryan, visiting family during a late-’90s spring break, found this mechanically-sound but sad-looking orange ex-Tennessee 610 hardtop coupe languishing in a Tampa driveway, he had to save it. He bought it, got it running, drove it back to Detroit from Tampa, and drove it through the rest of his college career and beyond. “In the snow, rear-drive, no ABS, didn’t matter,” he recalls. The 610 also helped him with his first post-college job, landing at Nissan Design International (NDI) near San Diego.





By 1975, a 2-liter version of Nissan's venerable L-series overhead-cam four-cylinder (a bigger version of the 510's powerplant) lived under the 610's hood. This 49-state version, coming out of Florida by way of Tennessee, made 97 horsepower—enough to get the 6.45 x 13-inch rubber, on 13 x 4.5-inch wheels, to chirp on launch were the driver so inclined.



Bryan worked with a longtime Datsun employee to get the colors and fabrics correct for his restoration; the cloth seating areas were a concession to living in warm southwestern climes without the benefit of air conditioning. The 610's 3 extra inches of wheelbase over the 510 allowed drivers a little more comfort; woodgrain vinyl trim on the dash adds a touch of upscale class.

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This was no simple spray bomb job: The lifesaving 610 was completely disassembled, its engine overhauled, and its body sanded down and prepped for three coats of single-stage PPG urethane. Many of the shabbier and broken pieces were discarded in favor of items scored in boneyards across the Southwest in the late '90s, but Bryan avoided the temptation of installing slimmer 1973-era, pre-5-mph bumpers for the sake of correctness.



You can see the look on the guy's face: "You spent all this money to restore this car and you kept *those* hubcaps?"

"So, it's 1999. Renault purchased Nissan. I wrote Jerry Hirshberg [head of NDI] and said I wanted to do a Datsun as my senior thesis. Jerry wrote back and invited me to visit and show my portfolio. Long story short, I was hired before graduation. When Nissan's usual recruiters came to school in Detroit, I was already hired so I wasn't interviewing. Instead, I was asked to pick the recruiters up from the airport in my Datsun! They're used to being driven around in new cars, nice cars! And I drove them around Detroit in my not-yet-restored 610." When Bryan moved to California, he was allowed to ship two cars, so he found a running Renault LeCar. "The two companies merged, so I had one of each [marque]," he reasons. "I alternated driving them to work."

And, following up on his promise from years earlier, Bryan made his 610 like new again. "In truth, it didn't need much—just love. It had all of its original components and just needed to be restored." In the late '90s and early 2000s, parts often came from the Southwest's plentiful wrecking yards. "I grew up in Phoenix, and all the cars there, the interiors turned to dust... but exteriors were rust-free. You could find grilles, bumpers, all sorts of exterior parts. You can't find those anymore, but back then you could."

The job would be even harder now: 610s were never plentiful on the ground, and few (if any) parts beyond mechanical bits are available. But Bryan was able to avail himself of resources within Nissan: "I went to Sheldon Payne, the head of color and material, and who had been there through the Datsun days; he would help find the right patterns and textures and reach into the archives, and we'd figure out ways to find or replicate correct patterns." Patterns uncharitably described by *Car and Driver* as

"Howard Johnson rococo." "I used those resources to give all that love to this car," Bryan says.

Today, this 610 is no longer in Bryan's hands—although he knows where it is now, in similar condition to when he passed it along. Even so, it remains influential in his post-Nissan designs. And it remains influential within Nissan also—although it's a little startling to think that anything started with a car as unassuming as the 610. Yet it did.

Consider: Although Nissan had luxury cars at home, like the Cedric/Gloria twins and the President, the 610 was Datsun's largest available car in the North American market. Lessons learned from the 610 gave us the 810, which soon morphed into the Maxima. It was a hot seller—at an elevated price point—at a time when Japanese imports were "voluntarily" restricted, meaning that while fewer cars sold, they were more loaded up with luxury goodies at a higher price point so Nissan could still make its millions. All of this happened in the heart of the personal-luxury era and well into the '80s: even the Z-monikered sports car evolved into the ZX, which ladled on the comfort-minded accoutrements. By 1990, with the Datsun name exchanged for the corporate Nissan moniker, the company created an entire exclusive North American division, Infiniti, to sell plushiest-of-the-plush Nissans.

It's a lot of history and growth to rest on the shoulders of one little rebadged Bluebird. But then again, so is saving someone's life. 🐼

I was always fascinated with Japan's interpretation of American muscle car design translated into Japanese economy-car proportions.



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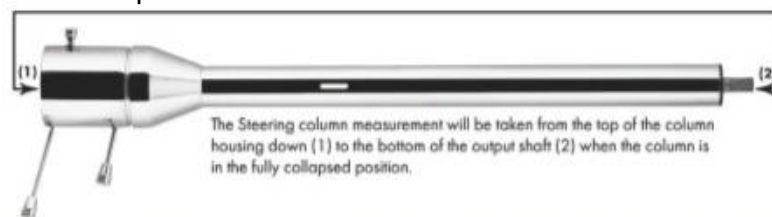
- Center a dummy column to the seat and position it so you feel comfortable and relaxed while seated behind it. Pro Tip: make sure to allow for the additional

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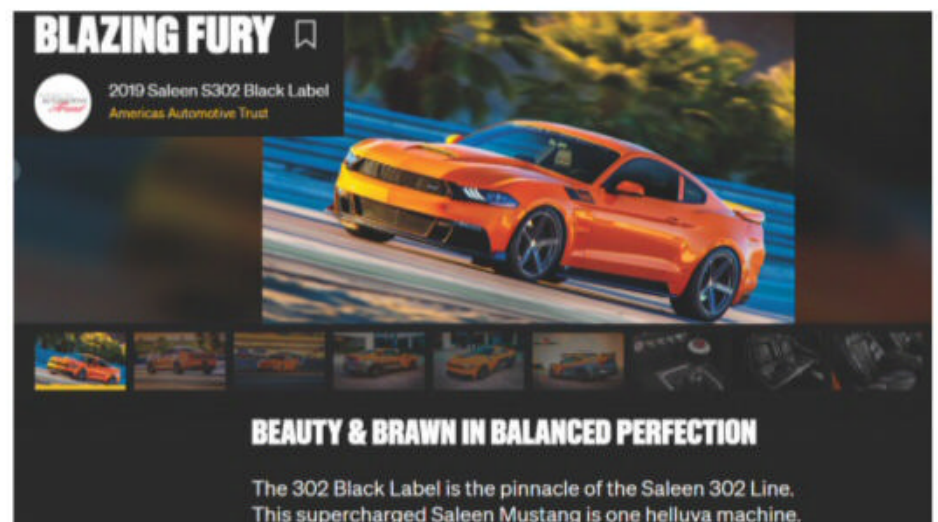
In 2017, I visited Stuttgart, Germany and found myself with free time before catching a plane back home. Like any self-respecting car enthusiast, I made a dash for the Porsche Museum. I took photos of the iconic cars and the stories on placards and planned to flip through them on my flight back to the States. But it was a hassle trying to match the car photos to the right story. I realized there was a better way to share a vehicle's story using the tech of the smartphone in my pocket - and that's when the idea for AutoBio was born.

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Selecting a resto shop requires homework, asking the right questions, and a leap of faith

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY BARRY KLUCZYK

We've all heard the horror stories about restorations gone awry, with cautionary tales of shoddy workmanship, of shops that seem to evaporate overnight, with customer cars left unfinished or their more valuable parts sold off by the unscrupulous shop owner.



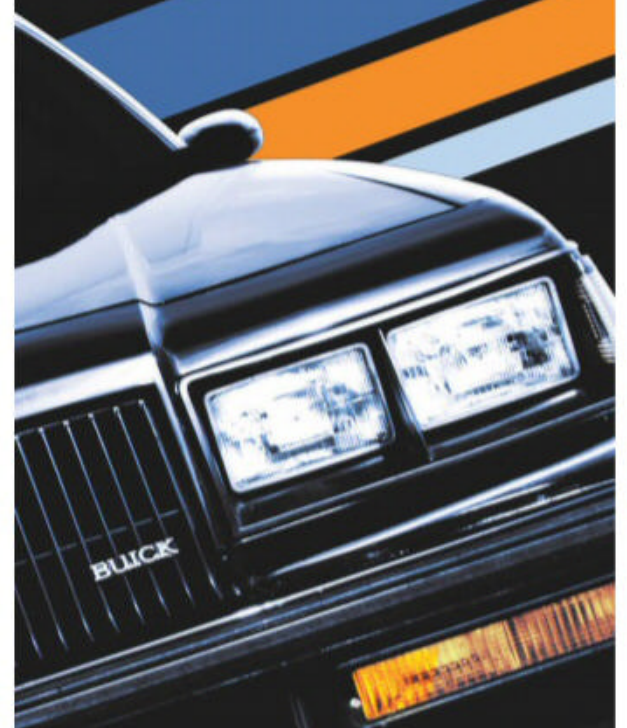
There's no question about it: Committing to a restoration is a monumental, expensive undertaking—and one that brings inevitable anxiety when put in the hands of someone else. Entrusting your vintage vehicle to a professional restorer demands a leap of faith, but not blind faith.

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“Bad news travels fast, so the reputations of shops spread quickly, especially when they’re not good. Ask around and listen to the experiences of others.”

In short: Do your homework. It may sound like comparatively obvious advice, but it can be a more challenging task for enthusiasts outside of larger urban areas that may offer more choices. It can be more difficult to find others with recommendations, so venturing beyond one’s comfort zone and immediate geographic circle may be the only viable option, par-

ticularly for more specialized vehicles.

“A shop that’s nearby may do great work on more traditional steel-bodied cars, but if you’ve got a Corvette, you really need to seek a shop with strong experience in working with fiberglass, even if it means taking it a much farther distance,” says Werner. “The logistics may add complexity to the project for you, but going with a shop that specializes in the type of vehicle you have will ultimately pay off in the finished restoration.”



Word of mouth will get you started. Speak to owners at car shows and ask where their restoration was performed — and don’t be afraid to ask how satisfied they were, and whether there were any significant issues in working with the restorer.



Tour the prospective restoration shop. In addition to viewing the other projects underway, inspect the facility and ask questions about how your vehicle will be incorporated into the workflow.

WHAT TO ASK

Even after the shop’s experience and apparent reputation are vetted, there are a number of questions to be asked to further verify its qualifications, while also rounding out your knowledge of its processes and procedures.

FOR A SHOP TOUR

The owner should be happy to walk you through the facility and show you the projects in progress. Inspect the work on the other vehicles and ask questions about the extent of work such as rust repair that have been made to them.

HOW LONG THE TECHNICIANS HAVE WORKED IN THE SHOP

Turnover is high in the restoration industry, especially with bodywork techs and painters, so it’s an encouraging sign if the shop has a good track record of retaining its staff.

ABOUT THE SHOP’S SPECIFIC SERVICES

Some do engine work in-house and others farm it out. It’s the same with upholstery, so it’s important to be clear about the shop’s role in every aspect of the restoration. In some cases, you may leave the bodywork, paint, and assembly to one shop and entrust the mechanical refurbishments to another.

IF THERE’S A BACKLOG OF OTHER PROJECTS

For a complete nut-and-bolt restoration, you can assume your car might be “under the knife” for perhaps a year, but some shops may have a waiting list of a year, 18 months, or longer, before they’d begin work on yours. Ask if there’s a queue before dropping off your vehicle.

HOW THE SHOP WILL DOCUMENT PROGRESS

The best shops will send regular updates with photos, depicting the progress of a customer’s project. It’s peace of mind—especially from a distance—that the restoration is moving forward, but also that the incremental payments for the work are being applied as the shop indicated.

ABOUT A DEPOSIT AND PAYMENT SCHEDULES

The shop will likely ask for a deposit in order to start the project, but in addition to that, there will be payments—or “draws”—throughout the project. They’ll often vary in amount, depending on the hours applied during each time period, along with any parts to be purchased, so be clear about how the shop expects to be paid during the restoration. Very generally, \$2,000-\$3,000 should be a sufficient good-faith deposit to get the ball rolling. Be wary if the shop asks for something very large (such as \$10,000) for the deposit. It could be trying to cover other bases with your money.



Seeking out a shop that specializes in specific vehicle genres or marques can pay off in a more authentic, knowledgeable restoration, but it may involve shipping the car a considerable distance, which makes it difficult for periodic personal inspections during the project.



Corvette restorations are a world unto themselves and it's important to seek an experienced Corvette specialist for such restorations. In fact, a Corvette specialist is a better bet for other fiberglass-bodied classics, as well.



Before the shop tears down your car and puts it on a rotisserie, a deposit will be required and a payment schedule established, as work progresses. If cash flow becomes a problem, let the shop know as soon as possible. It'll slow the work or pause it altogether, but communication is essential.



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Hourly labor rates vary greatly, ranging anywhere from \$45 per hour to \$120 or more. It's an important consideration in the restoration's investment, but other factors ultimately determine the total hours the project will consume, meaning the rate itself shouldn't be the deciding factor.



The unknown is one of the reasons it's difficult for a restoration shop to provide a precise estimate. This vintage Pontiac's floor seemed solid enough at first, but media blasting revealed quick-and-dirty previous patches and growing corrosion, requiring all-new floorpans — and the labor time involved in cutting out the old and welding in the new ones.



LEFT: Ask whether the shop farms out some of the subprojects such as engine building or upholstery. If so, ask about the vendors it works with. You may want to take the engine, for example, to another builder who specializes in the engine type of your vehicle.

DON'T SHOP BY THE HOUR

Regardless of one's resources, the bottom line for many is the bottom line of the restoration itself: just how much it will cost.

It's going to cost a lot. There's no way around it. For a full, rotisserie-type restoration, it could be 700-1,000 hours or more. It's logical, then, to ask about the shop's hourly labor rate, but it shouldn't be a primary factor in selecting a shop, says Werner.

"There is tremendous variation in the hourly labor rates charged by restoration shops, but the rate itself isn't the only indicator in how much the job will cost in the end," he says. "The few dollars you think you're saving per hour may eventually add up to more in the long run, if the shop spends more time on the car."

One shop may have a lower rate, but fewer technicians who ultimately take longer than a shop with a higher rate, and more craftspeople who may get the job done sooner. Also, one shop may subcontract more jobs than another, which also carries different costs.

A good chunk of that time is going to be carved out of the bodywork and paint. Hundreds of hours may be consumed in pre-paint block sanding and post-paint color sanding to achieve a flat, smooth appearance.

"We might have 400 hours into sanding and painting, and only 8 hours will actually involve spraying the color," says Nyle Wing, a longtime restorer who specializes in vintage muscle cars. "It's all in the countless hours of blocking before the paint is applied and color sanding afterward."

Don't tell the shop to take down the quality of the paintwork a few notches to save some money. Most will refuse.

"It's hard for some to understand why a paint job might be \$40,000, when a body shop will paint a car for far less," says Nyle. "Restoration shops are not body shops. The work is different and that's what you're paying for. We simply do our level of detail with the paint jobs, take it or leave it."

Werner echoes those sentiments.

"In the end, nobody is happy with a 'cheaper' paint job," he says. "For one thing, a still-expensive restoration just doesn't look great in the end. The customer is ultimately disappointed and it's the shop's reputation on the line when others see the compromised work."

It can also be frustrating when a shop doesn't offer a more definitive estimate when discussing the project, which can easily be interpreted as evasive or even shady on the shop's part. However, it's mostly because the shop doesn't know what it doesn't know.

"There are ballpark prices we can offer for certain materials and specific aspects of the project, like the block sanding, but it's very difficult to quote a price for the whole restoration when we haven't torn down the vehicle to see what we're really dealing with," says Werner. "Even good-appearing cars with no apparent big issues can reveal a nightmare after the paint is stripped. We have to make the assumption that we are working with the worst-case scenario with every vehicle, when it comes to rust, previous damage, etc."

That means the handshake deal for an agreed price often seen on cable TV car shows is just for the camera. Virtually no established, professional restoration shops operate that way. The projects are intentionally open-ended in order to leave room for the unexpected.

In the end, a restoration is an investment in the shop's time and your money. Locating a restorer with the experience for your vehicle is the first step and asking the right questions after you find it will help ensure your classic gets the most from both.

RESTORATION DOS AND DON'TS

Ten tips to make the most of your restoration investment

DO: Maintain insurance coverage

Anything can happen during the course of the restoration and, while the shop's insurance will provide coverage for some incidents, it's important to maintain your coverage for others. The shop could go out of business overnight, leaving you with only pieces of your car—or missing pieces of the more valuable components. Hedge your bets.

DON'T: Be afraid to ask questions

What kind and/or brand of paint does the shop typically use? Is it going to media blast the body or chemically strip it? If it doesn't do its own engine work, who does it typically use? Get into the weeds of your restoration, so you're clear about hows and whys of the work.

DO: Your homework

Be the champion for what's correct for your car, particularly if the shop doesn't necessarily specialize in your vehicle. Provide the guidance on surface finishes, model-year specifics, and other elements that will make the restoration more authentic.

DON'T: Hover over the restoration shop

Let the shop do its work. Helicopter-

ing over the project, because you live nearby, invites stress on your part and the craftspeople doing the work. A few in-person visits to track progress is fine, but don't make the shop your weekly haunt. You'll annoy the staff and interrupt the shop's workflow.

DO: Be clear about authenticity

Do you expect period-correct T-3 headlamps to be installed or are parts store replacements suitable? What about a date-coded fan shroud? Or NOS parts? The shop will build the car to your demands, so be sure to discuss and be clear about the level of authenticity you want in the vehicle.

DON'T: Change course midstream

It happens often: A simple repaint turns in to a full-blown restoration or standard resto turns in to a concours-ribbon-chasing project. Changing course midway through the project inevitably requires the shop to backtrack and redo work. That adds time and money. Make your plan before the shop starts and stick with it.

DO: Hunt down the hard parts

If your vehicle needs hard-to-find parts, track them down yourself rather than relying on the resto shop to do it.

You'll save the money it'll charge for spending hours on the internet doing so, while also ensuring the found items—especially used parts—live up to your standards.

DON'T: Throw away the take-off parts

Rusty, beat-up take-off parts may take up a lot of space, but don't toss them out until after the restoration is completed. You or the restoration shop will likely need them at some point for reference, a missing piece of hardware, or even as the pattern for fabricated component. Hold on to *everything* until the project is completed.

DO: Be patient

Restorations take a long time. It could take nine months, a year, or more, so get ready to wait. And sometimes the restoration shop is at the mercy of the schedule of outside vendors, such as upholsteryers or chrome shops. Be patient.

DON'T: Expect to make money

Only a fraction of cars are worth more than what it costs for a full restoration. If you're committing to the project, do it for the love of the car and thrill of the project itself. If it's because you're harboring notions of turning a profit after the color sanding is completed, don't bother. For the vast majority of vehicles, it ain't going to happen.



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The restoration shop should provide periodic photographic updates on the progress of your project.



There's no getting around it: Restoration-level paintwork is expensive — and it's expensive because it's time-consuming. Doing it right takes hundreds of hours of block sanding and wet sanding, all after the time involved in repairing rust and previous collision damage. Prepare to spend tens of thousands of dollars here.



LEFT: Be clear with the shop about the correctness expected of the restoration. Is “chassis black” suitable for the frame and suspension or do you want the factory-correct finishes for various brackets? And what about reproducing factory overspray or underspray on specific components? Don't leave it for the shop to decide. **RIGHT:** Experience counts for everything with a restoration shop, but the longevity of the staff is also important. Ask how long the various technicians and craftspeople have worked at the shop and their previous experience with restoration-caliber work.



A restoration is about time and money, requiring a lot of each. Don't rush the shop selection and don't make it for the sake of convenience. Choose an experienced shop with a proven track record, even if it's across the country. 🏠

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Responding to the Call

A passion for restoring old fire trucks evolved into a business

BY MATTHEW LITWIN • PHOTOGRAPHY BY THE AUTHOR AND JOHN GASPER

In an era when passenger cars and ½-ton pickups from the 1950s and '60s are consistently being subjected to an ever-revolving door of restoration work, conventional wisdom would have you believe there probably isn't much call for a specialist in the field of fire apparatus restoration. Fire-fighting equipment is, after all, a

comparative rarity on any given show field today. In theory, most old fire trucks are merely dusted off and used during an occasional holiday parade—at least the ones that weren't sent to the scrapyard after their viable years of civil service to the community had passed. In reality, the vintage fire-apparatus community is as active as any long-established make/

model car club you can think of. Among these enthusiasts, vintage first-response trucks are coveted, paraded, driven, displayed, and yes, restored. That's where specialists such as Gasper's Automotive Restoration come in.

Located in Manchester, Connecticut, Gasper's Automotive Restoration was established in 2010 by John Gasper, but

Gaspar's Automotive Restoration's first "officially" commissioned project was this 1927 Seagrave (opposite). That's proprietor John Gaspar standing alongside the truck, and he still serves as a volunteer firefighter.



A water tank is removed from a 1951 Mack that belongs to the Edgartown, Massachusetts, Fire Department. The truck recently arrived at Gaspar's shop for some repair work.



his ability to turn a corrective wrench on large-scale vintage equipment stems from far more humble beginnings. As John grew up in the nearby community of Hebron, his mechanical restoration skills were honed on a host of lawn mowers. With farming at the core of Hebron's founding, it didn't take long for John to unleash his budding talent on antique tractors, which prompted his father, Jack, to purchase a vintage pickup with which to haul John's restored farm equipment to area and regional shows. In time, that truck needed restoration work, as did the 1947 Studebaker M16 that John had purchased in 2004.

"By the summer of 1998, I already had a resume of restoration work, but it didn't dawn on me to turn it into a career yet," John says. "I had joined the local volunteer fire department and was looking towards a career as a marine engineer, a degree I later earned from the Maine Maritime Academy. One day, after returning from a fire call, we were reloading the hoses onto a contemporary truck and my eyes casually looked into the back of the garage. Parked parallel to the back wall, almost hidden in the shadows, was an old fire truck with chairs and a bunch of other stuff stacked on top of it. I asked my captain about it and he told me that it was the town's first gas-powered apparatus: a 1937 Ford Sanford that no longer functioned. At all. I asked about working on it and was told that the chief would have to approve it. He did, and before long I had the engine running. For the first time in who knows

Impossible-to-find parts for transfer cases, fire pumps, and rear differentials are fabricated by the in-house machine shop (top left). During our visit, John and his team were mechanically refurbishing a 1929 Maxim (center), including a complete engine rebuild (close-up, top right). John's personal 1920 American LaFrance, originated from the Mount Vernon, New York, Fire Department, patiently waits its turn (above).

how long it could be driven around the department grounds. Eventually, I headed a small team of other volunteers and together we began its complete restoration.

"A few years later, I visited a friend out on Martha's Vineyard [Massachusetts], and we went to see the fire apparatus museum. While I was out there, he mentioned it had a 1951 Mack A fire truck that needed attention, so I offered to help resurrect it. At some point during the restoration my friend stopped me and said,

'Hey, we can't let you work on this truck anymore unless we pay you for the time and effort.' That was kind of the moment when the light bulb went off in my head. I immediately thought, 'Okay, well, that sounds fine to me,' and we worked out a deal."

As the Mack neared its completion, news of John's ability and keen interest in fire trucks began to spread within the tight-knit community of departments throughout southern New England.



Several projects are underway as of this writing, including the complete ground-up restoration of a privately owned 1935 Maxim fire truck (above) and an original-owner 1972 Chevrolet Corvette (not shown). Both are scheduled to be finished by the end of May. At right is the frame of a 1938 Mack Type 75 fire engine from the Woburn, Massachusetts, department, during the truck's restoration. Its transmission (left/above left) was being rebuilt during our visit.



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Coupled with the newfound knowledge that the enjoyment of working on languishing apparatus as a hobby could be a profitable career path if managed properly, John founded his restoration company. The name may be misleading for a firm that specializes in large trucks; however, his restoration history with an assortment of vehicles made the name a pleasing and—to a greater extent—logical choice.

John's first shop was his home garage, where he embarked on his initial officially commissioned project: a 1927 Seagrave Suburbanite owned by the Woodbury (Connecticut) Fire Department. The Seagrave, when new, was the department's first truck, and was reacquired under the stipulation from the donor that it be given a comprehensive restoration. The project proceeded through two shop relocations and was completed in 2017, a story we brought to life in the July 2019 issue (#178) of this magazine.

Now operating from the historic Manchester Armory, Gasper's Automotive Restoration has completed multiple fire apparatus and passenger vehicle projects, including a concours-winning 1965 Volkswagen Sunroof Sedan seen in *HCC* #186. The shop staff consists of a small group of part-time help, and one full-time employee, Oliver Preissler, who is a graduate of McPherson College's automotive restoration program.

To demonstrate the versatility of the company, John and his dedicated team recently finished the restoration of a 1969 Jeep CJ5, and are in the process of completing regular servicing on the 1951 Mack mentioned earlier. In addition, the final touches are being administered to a 1972 Chevrolet Corvette, alongside a 1935 Maxim fire truck. Have we mentioned that John is still a volunteer firefighter, too?

"As we're talking," John says during our interview, "we just finished removing the water tank from a fire truck from Edgartown, Massachusetts, that needs some repair work, and we're finishing machine work on a water pump. It's not just full restorations that we can manage. Sometimes, trucks and cars need service work. Some of it is relatively simple; some isn't, but we can do it. It's been quite an adventure when I stop and think about it. Everyone loves to see an old fire truck restored to its full glory. What started with one truck tucked in a quiet corner of a department I volunteered at has turned into a business that has exceeded any of my expectations." 🐼



The Manchester Armory's gymnasium—originally added to the main office building via extensive steel construction—is now rentable collectible vehicle storage space.



One of the more difficult restorations was a 1965 Volkswagen Sunroof Sedan, its chassis seen here. The challenge wasn't the car's design, but rather finding parts that fit correctly.



Here's John's personal 1947 Studebaker M16 that he purchased in 2004 and subsequently restored. It was displayed at the 2013 Hemmings Motor News Concours d'Elegance, and was featured in the April 2014 issue of *HCC*.

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HAULING HARVESTERS

International's light trucks were built to tackle tough tasks

BY PATRICK FOSTER • PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF THE PAT FOSTER COLLECTION

It's easy to forget how large and important a truck manufacturer International Harvester was in its heyday. After introducing its first road vehicle, the 1907 Autobuggy, the company grew to be the largest producer of medium- and heavy-duty trucks in America. A sharp downturn in sales during the Great Depression convinced management to branch out into light-duty trucks, so in 1932 International added ½-ton pickups to its lineup. With this added volume, the company managed to maintain its position as one of the largest truck makers in America. International distinguished

itself during World War II as a supplier of heavy-duty military trucks, halftracks, and weapons carriers. Like other firms, after the war the company produced updated versions of its prewar models until all-new trucks could be designed.

That happy moment came in November 1949, when the company unveiled the L series: "New from bumper to taillight," the factory said. The new trucks were wonderfully attractive, featuring a modern "Comfo-Vision" cab—"the roomiest cab on the road"—with rounded lines, a curved one-piece windshield, and a hood that opened on either side. Up front was

a "moustache" grille with vertical slots in a painted front panel with two horizontal bars—chrome if you wanted—running below them. The chassis was all-new, designed for better load distribution and easier handling.

The lineup began with the L-110 ½-ton pickup, available in 115- or 127-inch-wheelbase sizes, and progressed up to the L-120 ¾-ton and the L-130 1-tonners, available in 115- and 134-inch wheelbases, all powered by a 220-cu.in., 101-hp overhead-valve six-cylinder engine. The trucks could also be ordered as chassis-only or chassis with cowl for



Like all International trucks, the L series was built rugged and tough. International's dealer organization was particularly strong in rural areas, and many IH pickups were sold for farm use.

customers planning to have specialty bodies installed.

After four years of a seller's market, there was a return to normal conditions in 1950, and International had to compete with the Big Three, Studebaker, and Willys for every sale. Then, in June, war broke out in Korea and suddenly everyone was rushing to buy a new car or truck, fearing the government would restrict vehicle sales. That August, International recorded its highest-ever monthly sales, but then the union struck for 10 weeks, crippling production and stopping International's sales momentum.

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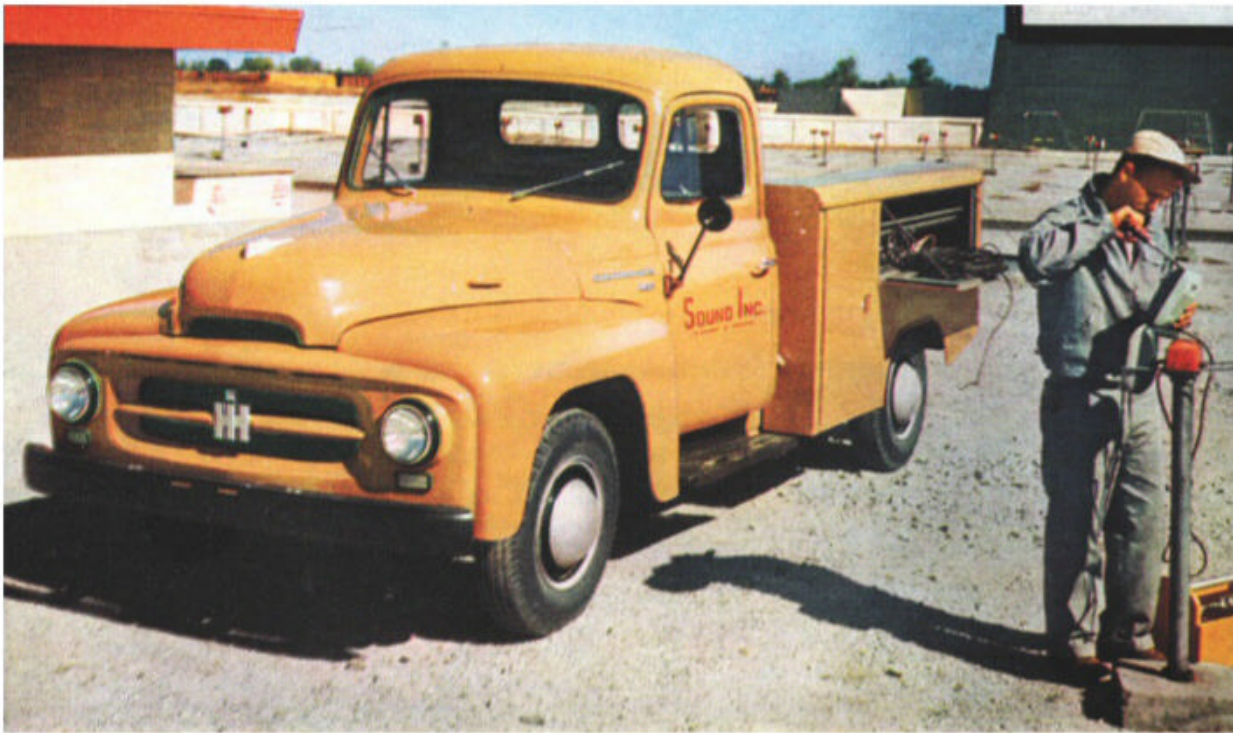
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International pickups available in 9 models with 6 1/2, 8, and 9-ft. bodies, 4,200 to 8,600 lbs. GVW.

TOP: International called its all-new 1950 1/2 truck "The Pick of the 1/2-Ton Pickups." Modern and stylish, the new trucks offered more room and comfort than ever before. The L-110 1/2-ton pickups were available with either a 115- or 127-inch wheelbase. **ABOVE:** Bigger jobs called for a heavier-duty truck, so this tire store ordered a 1950 International L-130 series 1-ton pickup.



For 1953, the L series was replaced by the R series, which was essentially an upgraded and improved version. New frontal styling was developed by industrial designer Ted Ornas, who went on to head up International's Styling Department for many years.

The 1951 L-series trucks were essentially carryovers from the prior year, with minor mechanical improvements. Sales continued to climb and the company built about 175,000 trucks of all sizes this year. It was a milestone year, with sales topping \$1 billion for the first time. Profits weren't all that good, however, falling to \$63 million. The company was dogged by ever-increasing costs during the year, including wages, salaries, materials, and supplies, as well as service and transportation. On the plus side, IH continued as one of America's major truck manufacturers and the number-one producer of medium and heavy trucks.

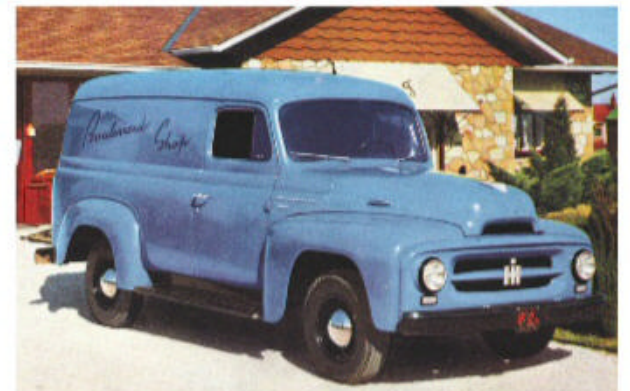
The L-series trucks carried over again into 1952 with only minor changes to paint options, plus mechanical updates. During the year, the company celebrated the 50th anniversary of its founding as the International Harvester Company. As part of the celebration, the truck division opened up a large new engineering and test complex, the most modern engineering facility in the industry. However, retail sales fell in 1952. The cause was a shortage of product due to a strike.

For the 1953 model year, the L-series trucks were given a facelift and mechanical improvements and became the R series. Styled by the Detroit-based

independent design firm Ornas and LeBarre, the new look was modern, uncluttered and very attractive. The somewhat busy grille of 1950-'52 was replaced by a cleanly styled rectangular panel with a central oval holding a tapered horizontal bar and IH logo, while the hood front now featured a large air intake slot. These were inexpensive changes but greatly modernized the trucks' appearance and even made them look lower. International's management was so pleased with the low-cost facelift they hired designer Ted Ornas and put him in charge of IH styling. Factory-built four-wheel drive now was offered in the R-140 4x4 and R-160 4x4 ranges. The growing popularity of four-wheel drive meant that additional 4x4 models would soon follow.

A clever new corporate logo debuted on International trucks this year. Featuring a red letter "i" over a black capital letter "H," it was designed by Raymond Loewy to represent a farmer on a tractor—the dot on the "i" was the driver's head.

Although dollar sales volume rose for 1953, profits fell once again because unit sales of trucks were down. It was an uneven year, with a record volume of business in the first half followed by a sharp



As before, the International light truck line included a stylish panel truck. This is the R-110, which rode a 115-inch wheelbase.



Also debuting this year was the new IH logo. Designed by Raymond Loewy, it represented a farmer on a tractor; the "dot" was the person's head.

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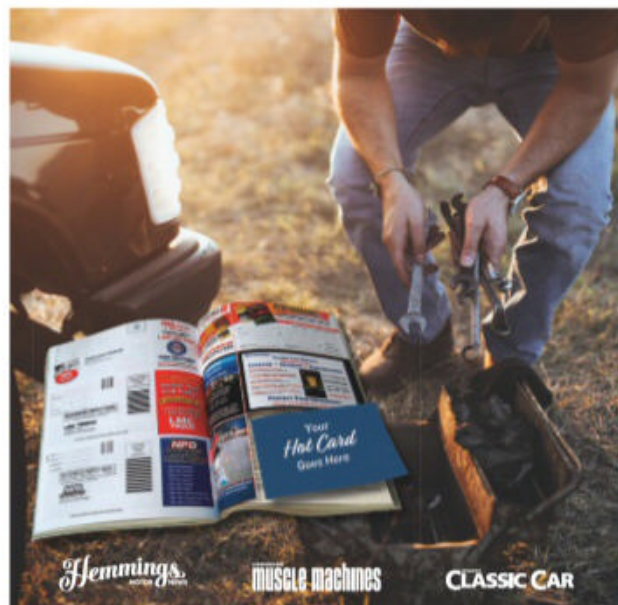
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slowdown in the second half. The company blamed higher wages and material costs for the slump in profits and vowed to introduce new economies throughout the business to offset those increases. By October 31, the company had pared its work force down to 68,000 employees to reduce expenses.

The sales slowdown that began in the second half of 1953 continued into 1954, exacerbated by a sharp drop in defense business (the Korean War had ended) and a drought in the Southern U.S. that drastically reduced farm income.

It was a shame the markets were so weak, because the 1954 International truck line was very strong. The R series returned with no appearance changes, but with plenty of improvements and enhancements. A new R-100 pickup debuted, with a 220-cu.in. Silver Diamond engine good for 104 hp. There were improved brakes, an optional GM-supplied Hydra-Matic transmission plus optional overdrive, and power steering. Tubeless tires became standard equipment, and right-hand steering was available.

Towards the tail end of the 1954 fiscal year and extending into early 1955, the motor truck division introduced some additional new products. A new R-120 4x4 pick-up was added to the 1955 lineup, with a choice of 115-, 122-, 127-, or 134-inch wheelbases. The 131-hp



Two 1954 International pickups, a red R-120 3/4-ton job and a yellow R-110 1/2-tonner. These trucks were very popular sellers.



1954 International R-110 advertised the ability to add more carrying capacity with the optional Ad-A-Rak sideboard and rack additions.

In late 1955, International released the new S-series trucks, which were a refinement of the R series. Fresh new styling by Ted Ornas gave these trucks a decidedly modern look, with an attractive grille, new hood, and headlamps now set in the fenders.





2021 GREAT RACE ROUTE

SATURDAY, JUNE 19

START: Alamo Plaza (Alamo front), San Antonio, TX - 8 a.m. to noon

LUNCH: Courthouse Square, downtown San Marcos, TX - noon

OVERNIGHT: Santa Fe Plaza, Temple, TX - 4:30 p.m.

SUNDAY, JUNE 20

LUNCH: Historic Courthouse Square, Granbury, TX - noon

OVERNIGHT: Horton Classic Car Museum, Nocona, TX - 4:15 p.m.

MONDAY, JUNE 21

LUNCH: Heart of Route 66 Auto Museum, Sapulpa, OK - 12:15 p.m.

OVERNIGHT: Main Street, downtown Joplin, MO - 5:00 p.m.

TUESDAY, JUNE 22

LUNCH: Benton Square on East 5th Street, Rolla, MO - 11:45 a.m.

OVERNIGHT: Main Street, downtown Cape Girardeau, MO - 5:15 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 23

LUNCH: Broadway and Water Street, downtown Paducah, KY - noon

OVERNIGHT: Veterans Blvd., downtown Owensboro, KY - 5 p.m.

THURSDAY, JUNE 24

LUNCH: Elizabethtown Sports Park, Elizabethtown, KY - 11:30 a.m.

OVERNIGHT: Griffin Gate Marriott, Lexington, KY - 5 p.m.

FRIDAY, JUNE 25

LUNCH: Heritage Station, 11th Street, downtown Huntington, WV - 11:40 a.m.

OVERNIGHT: Word Park, Neville Street, downtown Beckley, WV - 5:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, JUNE 26

LUNCH: Main Street, downtown Galax, VA - 11:15 a.m.

OVERNIGHT: Main Street, downtown Mooresville, NC - 5 p.m.

SUNDAY, JUNE 27

FINISH: Hyatt Regency, Main Street, downtown Greenville, SC - 1 p.m.

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New two-tone paint jobs also debuted with the new styling, so the International trucks now could be considerably "gussied-up." There were 12 standard exterior colors offered, plus the new optional two-tones. Note, too, the bright headlamp trim.



220-cu.in. six was the standard engine. With these changes, management hoped 1955 would be a better year.

The R-series light- and medium-duty trucks were produced through August of 1955. Then, in September, a new range called the S series was introduced. Although they retained the basic Comfo-

Vision cab, there was extensive restyling and mechanical improvements throughout the line. The cab now featured larger side windows and a larger one-piece rear window for improved visibility (these two features had actually debuted earlier in the year as a running change on the R models). New, rounded front fenders

now carried the headlamps, while a stylish redesigned grille held a larger oval, flanked by turn indicator lamps. The hood was flatter and included a wider air intake at the leading edge. The S-100 through S-170 series, built at the big IH plant in Springfield, Illinois, also offered a deluxe cab that included dual armrests and sun visors, and locks on both doors. Cab seats, doors, kick panels, and the back of the cab were upholstered in a choice of green, gray, or tan. There were 12 standard exterior colors offered, along with several new optional two-tones. There were also improvements to body mounts, frames, starters, clutches, springs, and transmissions, plus longer-life batteries and an improved fuel pump with an anti-vapor-lock feature. Engines were upgraded on all light-duty jobs. A 12-volt electrical system was now available at extra cost. All in all, these were greatly improved trucks.

During 1955, International's sales rebounded, partly due to the excellence of its products and partly because 1955 was a very good year for the economy in general. International sold more than 141,000 trucks during 1956, roughly 50,000 in the light truck category, the rest mediums and heavies. The S series continued with minor changes into mid-1957, when it was replaced by the all-new and larger Model A series, introduced by IH to celebrate 50 years as a truck builder. The new trucks were quite stylish, though somehow not quite as lovable as the classic L, R, and S series had been. 🚚

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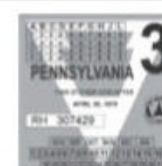


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- Seller of a 1980 Triumph TR8



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Carlisle Events, Lakeland Sale

Annual Florida auction brings in an event record \$4 million result

WE TYPICALLY THINK OF THE DESERT SOUTHWEST AS BEING THE hot zone for early in the calendar year auction action, but not in 2021. Florida has been the proverbial hotbed, with companies like Carlisle Events continuing to host live, in-person sales while complying with mandated COVID-19 pandemic social-distancing and other safety practices. Best known for its series of spring-to-fall shows in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, the firm has hosted several events in the Sunshine State for more than a decade, which in turn places the annual Lakeland Winter Collector Car Auction at the top of the calendar. This year's sale, held at the Sun 'n Fun Expo Campus in Lakeland on February 19-20,

delivered more than 400 automotive lots of all types to bidders.

At the end of the weekend, muscle cars claimed nine of the top-10 spots on the sales ladder. Leading was a 2019 Chevrolet Corvette ZR1 3ZR that sold for \$136,900 (all listed sale prices include a buyer's premium). Two other Corvettes followed: a 1967 roadster that realized \$97,370, and a 1957 roadster that achieved \$93,625. That total take set a new event record at more than \$4 million, a portion of which was the culmination of more affordable results, such as the lots we presented here. For a complete list of results from the Lakewood sale, and the current Carlisle Events calendar, visit carlisleevents.com.



1963 AMC RAMBLER CLASSIC 660

Reserve: Undisclosed **Avg. Market Range:**
Selling Price: \$21,400 \$21,500-\$38,000

There were several lots listed within the online catalog as being in all-original condition, and this six-passenger Cross Country was one such example. Though they were built under the AMC banner, the cars were still being identified as Ramblers, and this wagon originated from the Classic Six 660 series — so named because of the 195-cu.in. straight-six behind the grille. "Original Corsican gold metallic paint and original Ivory interior" was the big selling point, along with what was believed to be a scant 3,571 miles showing on the odometer at the time of cataloging. This station wagon sold nicely at the low end of the market range.



1959 CADILLAC SERIES 62 COUPE

Reserve: Undisclosed **Avg. Market Range:**
Selling Price: \$63,130 \$37,000-\$54,000

Cadillac's second-most-popular model during 1959 was this Series 62 hardtop coupe, one of 21,947 built that year. A contender for "The most iconic tailfins ever put on a car" award, this one had been given an over-the-top restoration that apparently earned it an AACA National award. That was interesting to us, since the trunk exhibited full carpeting throughout, and the engine bay had been decorated with all sorts of nonfactory fancy upgrades, such as a mirrored firewall, polished valve covers, and elongated air cleaner assembly. These seemed to matter little, as bidding pushed it into the sold column above market range.



1983 LINCOLN CONTINENTAL MARK VI

Reserve: Undisclosed **Avg. Market Range:**
Selling Price: \$10,200 \$7,000-\$17,000

Remember the Designer Series of Lincolns during the late 1970s? Well, the managers of Ford's luxury division continued that tradition into the '80s. The reason? To help distinguish the base Continental from the Continental Mark (in this case, VI). Designers like Bill Blass were retained, though the Blass edition was, for '83, given just to the two-door coupe to adopt his trademark features. Though the catalog didn't state it, one could have assumed this copy was an all-original example, bolstered by the claim, "Florida car with one previous owner." Close examination of the photos online indicated it was super clean inside and out. When new, this cost \$24,749, making the sale price a spiffy bargain.

LEGEND

Reserve: Minimum price owner will accept

Selling Price: What the vehicle sold for (including the buyer's premium)

Average Market Range: Values coincide with current market trends for vehicles rated from condition #2- to #1, respectively



Bonhams at Scottsdale

BONHAMS 10TH-ANNUAL SCOTTSDALE AUCTION TOOK PLACE AT THE Westin Kierland Resort & Spa, January 21. The one-day event offered 37 cars and netted total sales of more than \$5.77 million, with a 78-percent sell-through rate. Typically, the auction draws more than 100 cars, but the price-per-lot average increased this year and there were still some notable sales. The top earner was a BMW 507 Series II that had been owned for nearly 30 years by the consigner. It had taken part in many prestigious events, including Pebble Beach and the Ville d'Este. It retained much

of its originality inside and out, including the chrome. Original components were the Behr radiator and several Bosch and Knecht items. The engine was said to be an early factory replacement as there was no engine number on the block, but it was stamped with the correct "150 PS." The rare 507, one of only 253 built, was also fitted with a Becker Mexico radio. When the feverish bidding ended, the BMW sold for \$1,809,000.

Some good-old unmodified American iron also crossed the block and found new owners. The offerings spanned from a 1911 Maxwell Special Touring, selling for \$25,760, to a 1967 Eldorado, which brought in \$7,280. One of the standouts was a 1938 Buick Roadster Sport Phaeton. The car had been in Phoenix since 2007 and underwent a full restoration; since completion, only 6,000 miles have been added to the odometer. According to the Buick national registry, only a dozen of the 350 Sport Phaetons made in 1938 have been restored and are known to exist today. The full CCCA Classic and AACA eligible roadster would reach a final sale of \$52,640. All results from Bonhams Scottsdale are now available at bonhams.com.



McCormick's February Sale

McCORMICK'S AUCTIONS ANNOUNCED THE results from its 70th live auction, which took place February 26-28 in Palm Springs, California. This was the company's second event during the pandemic, but it was still able to put 322 vehicles across the block, with 230 finding new homes. When the

final numbers were tallied, more than \$4 million in total sales was realized. Among the prewar-era cars to sell was this 1940 Packard 120 convertible. The comprehensive restoration included a fully rebuilt drivetrain and gearbox, and it only had two owners for the last 45 years. The California Packard would see spirited bidding that drove the final sale up to \$96,460. Also catching our attention was a 1960 Ford Thunderbird hardtop. Said to be mostly original, the turquoise T-Bird rode on wide whitewalls and wore rare period-correct wheel covers. Believed to be repainted, the car was garaged full time and was equipped with a 352 V-8 mated to a three-speed automatic; the car also had power amenities, including steering, brakes and windows. The T-Bird would rumble out, selling for \$15,105. The next McCormick's auction will take place November 19-21 at The Palm Springs Convention Center. Visit www.classic-carauction.com for more information.

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"A proper restoration is equal parts research, to find out how the car was originally built; logistics, to source parts and materials; talent, to take it apart and put it back together properly; and probably some stubbornness for good measure, to get over those difficult periods every restorer encounters,"

Auctions Editor Terry Shea says. "Just about everyone can admire the skill and perseverance it takes to return a car as closely as possible to its factory specifications decades after it was made, or possibly after a prior restoration took it from that standard. At Hemmings, we regularly feature such restored cars in all our magazines and online, so it's no surprise to see them do well with our bidders."

A variety of vehicles exhibiting stunning restorations have crossed the virtual block in recent weeks, with some, like the 1979 MGB that found a new home for \$11,500, looking fresh from the showroom. Other interesting sales have included a 1969 Pontiac Grand Prix that brought \$18,375 as a Premium Classified, and the breathtaking 1933 Packard Super Eight Convertible Victoria that hammered for \$173,250.



1950 FORD CUSTOM DELUXE

Reserve: \$26,000

Selling Price: \$31,500

Recent Market Range:

\$24,320-\$36,550

Outside of the Country Squire wagon, the Custom Deluxe convertible coupe represented the finest Ford money could buy in 1950, and this restored example appeared very handsome. It promised to drive just as nicely as it looked, thanks to an over-drive in the transmission and the 239-cu.in. flathead V-8 being cooled via an aftermarket aluminum radiator and thermostatically controlled fan. The interior sported breathable tweed fabric on the seats and door panels, while the undercarriage was as clean as the folding power top. This Ford inspired nearly 17,000 views, and hammered for a figure that surely pleased both the buyer and seller.



1929 LINCOLN MODEL L

Reserve: \$55,000

Selling Price: \$91,350

Recent Market Range:

\$56,250-\$75,611

Few upmarket automobiles embodied the Jazz Age better than colorful, large open-touring cars, and this four-passenger sport phaeton coachwork by Locke & Company on a 1929 Model L chassis was truly puttin' on the Ritz. An older restoration was claimed, and the Lincoln's condition was very attractive, with no rust, minimal road-related paint damage, and a fine top and interior fittings. The 384.8-cu.in. flathead V-8 looked equally trim and tidy under the long, louvered hood. It wasn't surprising that nearly 140 people followed this auction, and that the car's 37 bids boosted the selling price to nearly double the reserve.

LEGEND

Reserve: Minimum price owner will accept

Selling Price*: What the vehicle sold for, inclusive of buyer's 5-percent fee
(*sold as a Premium Classified following the live auction)

Recent Market Range: The low-to-high value range for the vehicle based on published results of similar vehicles sold at auction over the previous 18 months

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1950 CHEVROLET 3100

Reserve: \$18,000

Selling Price: \$23,625

Recent Market Range:

\$16,430-\$25,360

Today's trucks can be had with nearly every convenience feature found in the highest of high-end cars, making them 3-ton luxury stand-ins. The "Advance Design" five-window 1950 Chevy pickup here shows how far those luxu haulers have come from their roots as basic, honest, work-for-a-living transportation. It was restored to largely factory-stock mechanical condition, save for the fitment of an era-correct four-speed-manual gearbox mated to the 92-horsepower, 235-cubic-inch straight-six, and its appearance was boosted by a black-walnut-trimmed bed. Some condition issues were noted, but the seller's transparency helped the 3100 find a happy new owner.



1956 FORD FAIRLANE CROWN VICTORIA SKYLINER

Reserve: \$48,000

Selling Price*: \$50,400

Recent Market Range:

\$47,650-\$79,320

Ford's unique take on building a stylish "hardtop" let the sun or moon shine in, and this final-year example of the premium Crown Victoria Skyliner—one of just 603 built—looked appealingly fresh from every angle, thanks to its two-year-old, detail-oriented rotisserie restoration. Aftermarket additions were limited to a water temperature gauge, A/C, and a retro-look stereo, with everything else remaining as it left the factory, including Ford's optional Continental spare. Ample detailed photography and numerous videos gave bidders lots to chew on and, after one final offer tipped this Premium Classified into the sold category, the Skyliner ended up falling neatly within market range.

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"

In fact,

a lot of things

happened

much earlier

than we

realize.

"

It's a question of when

In journalism school they teach you that people love lists, and that they also love to read about the first, the biggest, the best, and the most expensive. So, in a naked attempt to grab your attention, I am presenting a list of automotive firsts, even though it seems that as soon as some innovation is touted as the first, someone uncovers an even earlier one.

The great Packard automobile company gave us several firsts over the years, such as the taillamp. Packard came out with it in 1900, along with the steering wheel. The steering wheel had previously been used on French race cars, but Packard first offered it on a passenger car at the turn of the last century. It happened because the Packard brothers, James and William, were out for a spin in their 1899 runabout and hit a pothole.

This caused the tiller to swing over and bash James' knee. When they got back to the factory, they told their engineer to come up with something better, and the steering wheel was the result. It didn't meet with immediate success though, because the automotive press panned it, asking, "How will you know which direction you are going?" Later, Packard was the first to offer air conditioning, in 1940. Cadillac reciprocated in 1941, but it really didn't catch on until the 1950s.

A few naïve people think Henry Ford invented the automobile, but most of us know that is not true. However, quite a few also believe that Ford invented mass production and the assembly line. And that is also not true. Oldsmobile was building cars with interchangeable parts, using an assembly line, in 1900. What Ford came up with was the *moving* assembly line. He got the idea from the slaughterhouses in Chicago, where they butchered animals on a moving *disassembly* line. Ford just reverse engineered the process.

Later, in the 1920s, Packard also came up with the hypoid spiral gear differential, which was a real boon to automakers because it was much quieter than the conventional ones with straight-cut gears, and it allowed the car to sit lower. And then, in 1929, Cadillac debuted synchromesh in its standard H-gate transmissions, making shifting much easier and smoother.

There are those who would tell you that Chrysler pioneered unit-body construction, but it didn't. Lancia got it going in 1922. In fact, a lot of things happened much earlier than we realize. Supercharging, for example. The Germans used

crankshaft-driven centrifugal blowers on their Maybach dirigible engines in World War I so they could fly at 20,000 feet and avoid interception. After the war, the Germans adapted superchargers to their racecars. But the Roots-type blower even predates the automobile! It was used originally to pump air into coal mines, and was later adapted to automobiles. And the first turbocharger? That was invented by Swiss engineer Alfred Buchi, who patented the device in 1905.

Many of us think disc brakes came out in the 1970s, but Tucker had them in the 1940s, and Crosley—an early maker of subcompact cars—offered them in 1949. However, both were latecomers to the party. That's because Lanchester, a British manufacturer, initially offered disc brakes in 1902. And how about antilock brakes? You might guess the 1980s for their debut, but a fellow named Karl Wessel patented them in 1928. It's too bad they weren't adapted earlier. They could have saved lives.

The invention of the automatic transmission is difficult to pin down, depending on your definition. It is generally credited to Oldsmobile in 1940, when it came out with the Hydra-Matic, which was superior to previous designs. But REO had a two-speed automatic in 1932, and Hudson offered its Electric Hand from 1935 through 1938. Also, Chrysler came out with Fluid Drive in 1940, and then there was the preselector gearbox patented by W.G. Wilson in 1928. The semi-automatic was used in cars, buses, and armored vehicles.

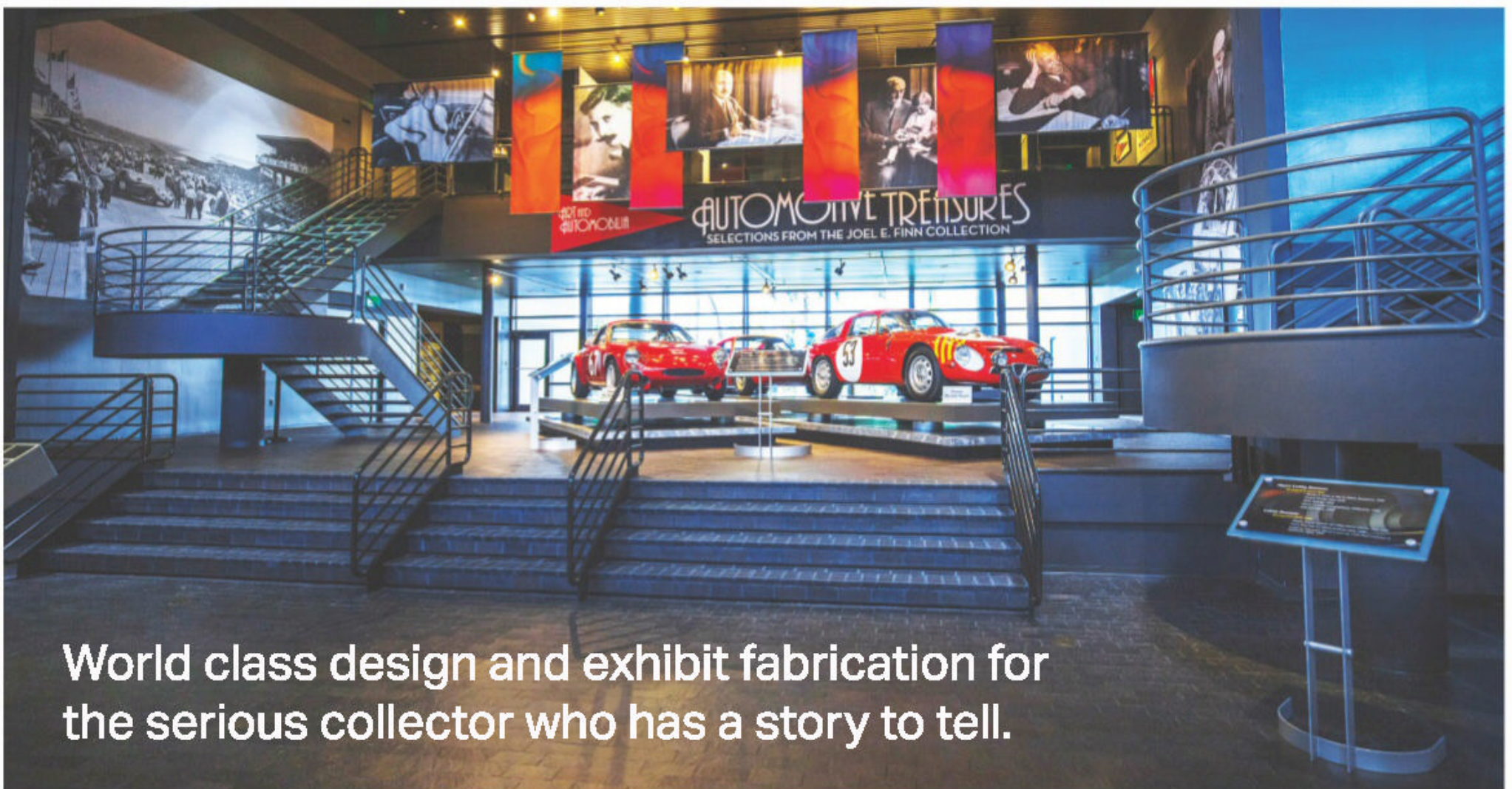
How about the first retractable hardtop? You'd guess Ford in 1957, right? Wrong. Peugeot came out with it initially in 1935, on the 401 Eclipse. In fact, Peugeot still offers a retractable today. Power steering first appeared on the 1951 Chrysler Imperial. I remember it well, because the first time I drove one was scary. It was a behemoth of a car, but the steering was so effortless that it seemed like the wheel wasn't connected to anything.

Now they are working on driverless cars, but my brother-in-law pioneered that more than 50 years ago, when he didn't properly set the handbrake on a hill in his 1957 Nash Metropolitan. He left the engine running because he was just going to run into the house to grab something he forgot. The little Metro rolled about 200 yards, went around a curve, jumped a curb, and went out into a field. He called the police and reported the car stolen. Needless to say, the technology needed a little refinement. 🐼

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