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One That Got Away

By Bob Ruckman

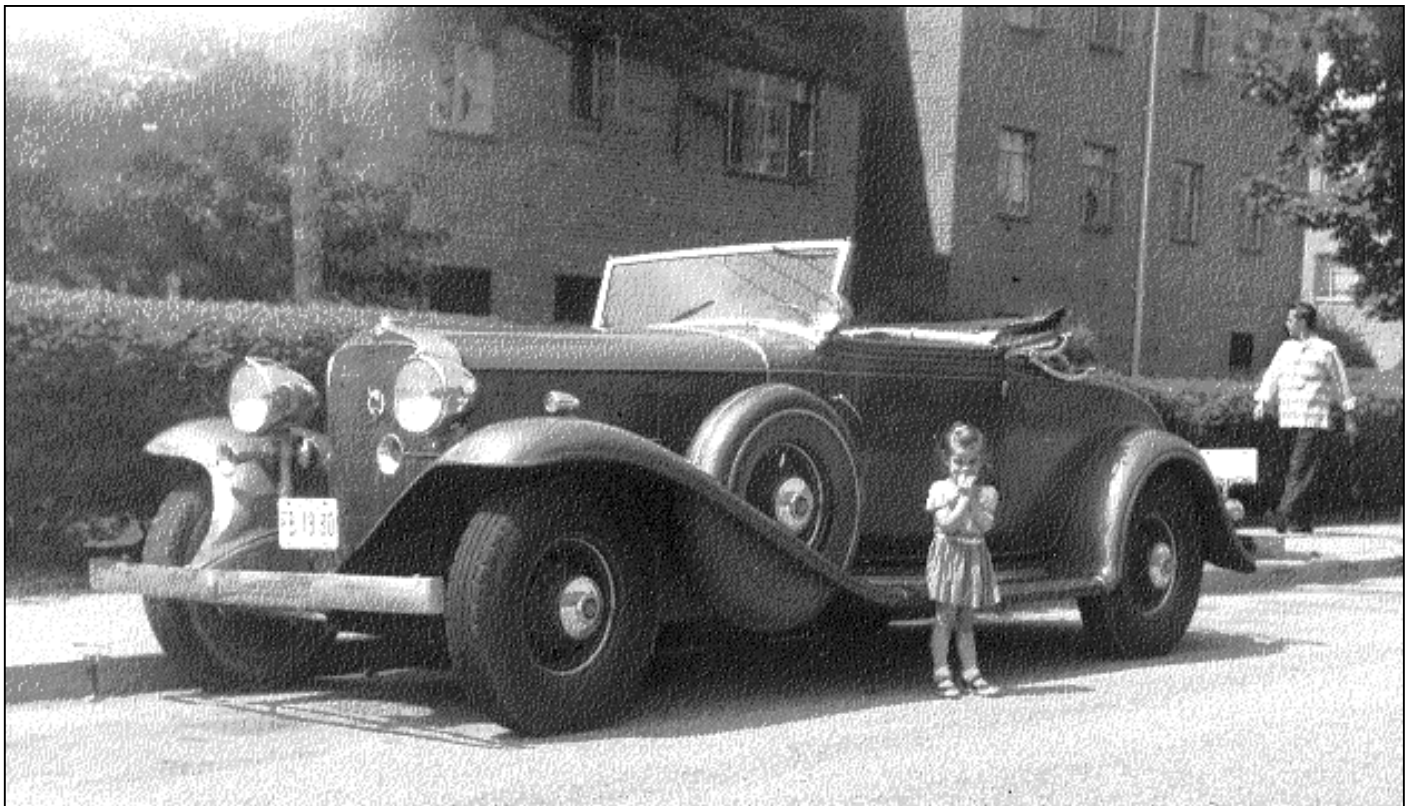
I have a good friend in Britain who sends me articles about old cars, which he finds in British publications. Recently he sent me one from Manchester's *The Independent*, in which its auto columnist pictured and praised the 1932 Cadillac V-16 as superior to the Rolls-Royce of that era. I sent that article to a member of the local Cadillac-LaSalle Club, suggesting that he share it with his club members.

In my cover letter to him, I commented that although I'd never owned a V-16, I did have a Cadillac V-12 Convertible Coupe once. He then phoned me to say that the club's editor was interested in an article about my car. Here it is.

In 1952 I bought my first car, a 20-year old Plymouth 4-dr sedan, which became both my daily driver as well as a participant in antique car meets. But at the first AACA Hershey Fall Meet in 1954 I saw some classic cars, which caused me to want one. In 1956 I found a 1928 Packard Convertible Coupe for sale, so I bought it, and in a rented garage I began its slow, two-year restoration.

In 1957, my mentor, Fred Long, told me of a 1932 Cadillac V-12 Convertible Coupe for sale nearby, which we went to look at. The car was sitting in the owner's side yard, unused since her husband had died, but enclosed in a makeshift shelter.

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My daughter Susan with the 1932 Cadillac V-12 Convertible Coupe

One That Got Away – continued

The woman accepted \$200 for the Cadillac. Its tires were mostly flat, and it wouldn't start, so Fred brought a tank of compressed air, which he used to fill the Cadillac's tires. Then we knocked down the wooden framework surrounding the car, and Fred wrapped a tire chain around its front bumper and his Hudson's back bumper and towed it to his back yard in Hyattsville, MD, about a mile from my apartment.

This photo shows the Cadillac as we found it, intact and complete, including its tool kit. >>



In Fred's back yard I tried to find out why it wouldn't start, and found that its twin coils were dead. Replacing them with a couple of used coils, it started. *The photo on the right shows the Cadillac outside my apartment in nearby Mt. Rainier, MD, to which I had driven it under its own power. >>*



How many teenagers today are mirroring that kid's "don't care" attitude, wasting time on playing electronic games? One is either inspired to find, and work on, an old

car and turn it into something one can be proud to own and drive, or not, but I doubt that one can automatically hand someone an unrestored vehicle, and turn him into a car restorer.

As I was, at that time, a young married man with a child, Susan, shown in the photo on page one, and a very low-paying job, I realized that such a classic should probably go to someone who could afford to give it a proper restoration, which was beyond my means. I was already trying to keep my '32 Plymouth running, and working many hours on restoring my '28 Packard, so I simply could not afford to keep, or even garage, the Cadillac. I advertised the car, and it was bought by Jerold Hoffberger, then owner of the Baltimore Orioles, who surely could afford to restore it. He confided to me that he had a 17-year old son with a lot of idle time on his hands and no particular constructive interests, so the son was supposed to be inspired to restore the Cadillac.

In any case, about a year later, a friend told me that he saw a "For Sale" ad in a Baltimore newspaper, offering the Cadillac. I don't know who bought the car or what happened to it. Since then, I have seen no reference to it in any auto publication, although a restored maroon one was advertised some years later.

I owned this V-12 Cadillac for a mere two weeks, and made a badly needed \$300 profit. I hope that someone did complete its restoration, and that it still exists, but I can't trace the car, since I didn't even find and record its serial or engine number. However, if its current owner traced the car's history back to Mr. Hoffberger, at least I have told the 48-year-old story of this fine car's previous history.



Rumble Seat View



Cadillac Ready to Move On

When Mr. Hoffberger arrived to purchase the car for his son, again it failed to start. But he had been driven to Hyattsville by his chauffeur, so