

Fourteen Years of Hard Labor

By Tom Young

Back in 1988 my brother John bought the car of his dreams, a red 1957 Thunderbird with two tops. Our Uncle Jack had a black '57 E code (two four barrel carbs) Thunderbird that he bought new, and John always wanted one of his own. We took his car to some local car shows where Thunderbird enthusiasts told us what was right and wrong with his partially restored car. John showed his car a couple of times at AACA shows and realized his car would never make it unless he did a complete frame off restoration. This is where I got my Thunderbird start, searching all over the country for new old stock parts for the second restoration of John's car.

Since 1968, I had been heavily involved in drag racing with my brother Jim. I had been racing my own car starting in 1973 with a brand new Dodge Charger. In 1990, after racing for many years, I got the urge to buy an old car to tinker with. A neighbor told me

*The restored 1960
Thunderbird at Hershey
in 2006, above and right >>*

about a 1960 Thunderbird in a mechanic's shop that was for sale. The owner of the shop was going through a divorce and was selling the car, his business, and his house. The price of the car was \$5,000, as I was told. This amount was not within my budget at the time so I never went to look at the car. A month or so went by and my neighbor inquired if I ever went to look at the 1960 Tbird. I said that I hadn't and he then told me the owner only wanted \$2,500 now. This cheaper price prompted me to take one of my buddies to look at the car. I initially asked him to go because he was looking for a car to customize as they did in the '50s.



He liked the car but felt it was not what he was looking for, which was great for me because I decided I wanted it.

Now I had one major obstacle to overcome, my wife Linda! I went home to convince her that this car for \$2,800 (the actual asking price) was a bargain for such a nice car and that I could make a profit on the car immediately if I decided to sell it. As you guessed, she went for it, and I bought the '60 Tbird for \$2,600 after some heavy negotiating. The price was good, but there was one catch, the guy never got the title from the previous owner, a friend of his ex-wife's. He was very straight forward with information about the previous owner, he gave me a name and address, but said he would have no part in contacting them about the title.

The night before I bought the car I called the previous owner and explained my situation about buying the car. He agreed to help me get the original title so I didn't have to go through a title service like the ones offered in *Hemmings Motor News*. In the meantime, I cleaned and repaired the car

from front to rear for the next four months waiting for the guy to come up with the title. After going through the Department of Motor Vehicles in two states, I finally got my title on the 4th of July!

For the next year I fixed-up and replaced things - tires, hubcaps, body seals, etc., and repainted the roof with a fresh coat of

the original Monte Carlo red. My first show with my Thunderbird was the Vintage Thunderbird Club International Convention in Northern Virginia in 1991. I entered in a drivers' category where they didn't judge the trunk or under the hood, which was perfect for my car.

Being a perfectionist (and really a mental case!), I was worried about being the laughing stock of the show

Continued on the next page >>

Fourteen Years of Hard Labor - continued

when I drove on the show field. As it turned out, there were nine cars in the class, and I scored a second place, losing to Ralph Holmes' low mileage 1959 hardtop, which years later won Best of Show honors at an International Thunderbird Club (ITC) Convention. He deserved first, and I was elated with the second place trophy!

The following year (1992) I decided to redo the red leather interior because the Arizona and California sun, where the car originally came from, had killed the interior. I had lost most of my points at the 1991 show because of the poor condition of my seats. I packed everything up and sent it to my friend, and Thunderbird expert, Jim Weatherly in Fullerton, CA, where he had the seats rejuvenated with a custom set of red leather covers. I spray dyed all

Tom preparing the TBird in Class 27D at Hershey >>

of the interior panels and reinstalled the new seats. After this work the interior looked great, but the rest of the car needed too much to satisfy me, so I told Linda I was going to strip the car, and completely restore it.

For the next fourteen years, I plastic media blasted, sandblasted, worked on the body, and reconditioned everything including plating. I shopped high and low for new old stock parts in an effort to make it the best darn 1960 Thunderbird hardtop that I could make it! My two brothers tell everyone that I built three Thunderbirds because I did everything at least three times to get it right.

It took me two years to get it painted because my first guy bailed out on me after I waited almost a year for him to paint it. After the paint was completed in April 2006, I spent the entire summer assembling the car with a target completion date of August. I wanted to debut the car at the ITC Convention in North Carolina, but fell short when too many glitches occurred. For example, after buying and installing a new windshield after the car was painted, I had the car on jack stands for a week in my garage during a heat wave of 90 to 100 degree days, only to come home one night to find my new windshield cracked from top

to bottom. I immediately ordered a new windshield and when it arrived I opened the box to find they had sent me the wrong unit. They sent me glass for a 1961 Thunderbird, so I had to wait for the correct windshield to be sent once again, at the tune of another \$500 dollars!

When it became obvious that I was never going to make it to North Carolina with this car, I reset my goal to October for the big AACA Eastern Division Fall Meet in Hershey, PA. After a week of rest in NC with my ITC friends, I hit the car real hard and finished it at noon, October 4th, just three days before the show at Hershey. My brother John and I loaded the car in the trailer and were on the Chocolate Field at Hershey by 4:30 PM that same day!



On Saturday, I was greeted by Kathy and Don Holton at the show field entrance. When I arrived at my parking spot in Class 27D, I was also greeted by ITC members Harold Warg, and Sandy Schatz, who know as much about squarebirds as anyone. So I asked them to look the car over and give me a judge's report,

which they gladly did. Sandy found I had three missing upholstery buttons on my trunk sideboards, so my brother John set off to find some buttons before the AACA judges arrived. Well, after an hour's trek John came back empty handed because no Thunderbird vendors had the buttons. Finally the judges arrived and seemed quite impressed. Later that night at the Awards Banquet, I received my First Junior Award, the best that I could do at this show with the AACA. As a matter of fact, I was the only car in that class to get a First Junior, and five cars were going for that award.

I have to admit the car drew more attention than I ever imagined at Hershey and I am the most proud of the detailing on the car. I made rubber inspection stamps, and date coded many parts after hours of research on documentation of original cars. I even date coded my own side glass, as no glass companies had the proper date codes for my car. It's details like this that I hope will catch the judges' eyes when I take the car to all the Ford and Thunderbird shows that I plan to attend in 2007. As you can imagine, I just can't wait to get to the ITC Convention this year in Bethlehem, PA, because I just finished fourteen years of hard labor!