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Antique Cars: A Hobby For The Whole Family

By Gary Wilmer & Vicky Wilmer

Gary's Attraction To Cars

My interest in cars was probably inherited from my grandfather, who sold Lexington cars in the Baltimore area, and from my father who rarely kept a car long enough for me to ride in it before he sold it and bought another. I remember as a young boy going to local dealers to look at the new and used cars and just hang around, which I could do since my father knew the owners personally. I should have collected sales literature and promotional models, but I didn't realize at the time what that stuff would bring today.

was all there. I towed it home, did all the necessary things to get the engine to turn over, and sure enough, it fired up and ran. Boy, was that exciting – just to know that I had done it all myself! I was barely 20 years old and had never worked on a flathead engine.

I was hooked, so I started attending local car shows with the intent of fixing up the '40. At a Chesapeake Region flea market some 32 years ago, I joined the club. Gradually, I developed an illness that I still suffer from today. I wanted another antique car, and then another; but without selling any of what I already owned. I was still living at

member Jack Schaller, and drove it home. With no place to store the '37 some of my collection had to go, so the '40 sedan and the street rod were sold.

The 1937 Ford is a club coupe (with a back seat), model 78-720, of which only 16,992 were built compared to the single seat business coupe, which had 117,130 produced. It was the first year that Ford had an all-steel roof. Headlights were molded into the fenders, in contrast to the earlier headlight stands bolted onto the fenders. This change gave the 1937 Fords a more streamlined look. The 85 HP flathead V-8 engine powers the car



Gary's early desire for performance cars is evident in his current antiques: 1962 Corvette & 1963 Pontiac Bonneville

As I approached driving age, I dreamed of having a new high-performance car such as a 1967 Chevelle 396, or a GTO. However, since my father was involved with and knew a lot about good used cars, I always had a nice used car for daily use, and I grew to like even older cars and trucks.

In 1971 or 1972, I purchased my first antique car. It was a 1940 Ford 2-door standard sedan that my uncle had stored in his son's barn for years. It did not run, but it was solid, half in primer, and

home, without the benefit of anyplace to store a car other than on a Baltimore city street. I subsequently bought a 1953 Ford pickup and a 1940 Ford coupe street rod. Everything was garaged at friends and relatives homes.

The first antique car you own leaves an impression on you, and that's probably why I sort of gravitated to old Fords. In 1977, while reading the Sunday *Baltimore Sun* classified ads; I spotted a 1937 Ford for sale. I reached an agreement with the owner, late club

and it cruises effortlessly at 60 MPH, making it a very practical antique car for shows and tours. It still has the original mechanical brakes, which stop the car with relative ease. The car's color is Adobe Tan with Chinese Red pinstripes and wheels. This combination was a spring color option. The factory price of this model was \$720.

Fast forward to 2009, and my antique car illness has become worse. The count is 9 cars (see the box on page 2),

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Hobby for the Family - continued

and who knows where it will end? I retired in 2008 after 25 years with the Post Office. Now I work on old cars (some new) at home.

Vicky's Two Cents Worth

I was introduced to Gary by friends in the club (Dick and Pam Alexander, and Dick and Betty Fisher). From that time on, I figured antique cars would be a part of my life. Gary would come to pick me up for a date in his 1953 Ford pickup, or sometimes we would go on a Sunday cruise in his 1962 Corvette. Before we married, we went on many car tours, cruise-ins, and shows. The people I met were always friendly and welcoming. We went to interesting places and, of course, we always found great places to eat.

When Gary asked me to marry, I knew exactly what cars I wanted for the wedding. Gary let my dad borrow his 1953 Ford pickup to take me to the wedding, and we left the church in his beautiful 1937 Ford club coupe. Some of our car friends came to the wedding in their antique cars, which made it special for us both.

As newlyweds, we continued to attend car shows most weekends in the spring, summer and fall. I would usually walk around and look at the cars and the flea market for a while, and then I would head back to sit at the car and grade my students' papers. Everyone knew that was where they could find me and often some of the wives would come and sit and talk with me while I graded papers. On the way home, we were sure to stop at some great place for dinner.

We also went on many great tours that took us to incredible places; museums, historic places, Amish communities, a coal mine, personal automotive collections, just to name a few. By now the car hobby was not just Gary's but also mine. Together we would work on the cars and get them ready for shows.

We also started inviting my parents to travel with us in the antique cars.

Soon we were expecting the boys. Although we were excited, I know Gary wondered how this was going to affect his car hobby. Gary and I both knew

attended their first car show when they were one month old, and they have been going ever since.

Chesapeake Region has initiated a lot of new and different events that just happen to have old cars involved.

Going to a car show and just sitting in a parking lot probably would not be very exciting as a family event. However, shows such as the Flowermart, Ladew Gardens, the Fire Museum, Annual Banquet, Crab Feast, etc. are all very interesting and also fun for the entire family.

I like to go as a family, enjoy helping at club events, and interacting with all the members. As the boys have gotten older, sometimes I can't go to the shows so one or both of them will go with Gary. This gives them a special day with Dad. We continue to invite my parents to travel with us and we have gone on several great trips: Georgia's mountains, New York, Niagara Falls, and Dearborn, Michigan. Each year brings new adventures.



- Antique Cars Owned**
 1937 Ford - owned 32 years
 1950 Mercury Sedan
 1962 Corvette
 1963 Chevrolet Impala SS
 Senior winner 2008
 1963 Chevrolet
 To be restored by family
 1963 Pontiac Bonneville
 Senior winner 1998
 1964 Corvette
 1968 Chevelle
 1973 Pontiac TransAm
 One owner, 40K miles
Plus
 16 old gas pumps to restore

From the top: the 1937 Ford club coupe, our family at Hershey 2007 in front of the 1963 Chevrolet Impala SS, and the 1950 Mercury – a tour car with comfortable room for six people

the importance of our family enjoying things together. Andrew and Todd

I grew up in a close-knit family environment, and my dad had a long automotive career. It seems almost destiny that our boys will be involved in the antique car hobby. The boys are now at the age that we can do maintenance and restoration projects as a family: Vicky, Gary, Andrew, & Todd.