

Savoring Evolution Parts

By Bob Schmeichel

How we react with everything we do throughout our lives, from young to old, is based on either visual things we see, things we smell, verbal things we say or hear, or physical things we do or touch. Most of the time there is either a positive or negative feeling that shows itself in each one of those areas, which helps us develop our personality as an individual. Positive feelings or happy memories, everyone hangs onto knowing they are good, and the negative ones are put to the side but not necessarily forgotten. You are probably wondering how this threads itself into a car article, so let me try to convey my broad thoughts so you can hopefully understand. I started building model cars in 1957. With that I loved the hands-on approach and seeing the finished product

that not only gave me pride but a broad understanding of how cars went together. As I became a teenager in the 60s, real cars excited me not only because of the power each processed, but because each car brand was very visually different then. One fun thing from that time frame was being able to identify a car coming at you from a quarter mile away. With all the neat lines and chrome trim the cars came with, as well as increased horsepower, these were definitely fun times that the majority of teenagers as well as adults got involved with. For those who wanted to get a little more serious about going fast with their cars, Thunder Valley Dragways opened up in 1967. Drag racing was new in South Dakota and was turning into a full-tilt sport across the nation with horsepower increasing from each of the Big Three auto makers until 1970. As I remember, the 1970 Chevrolet Chevelle SS 454 LS6 was the highest rated, advertised with 450 horsepower available. It was one of the more desirable cars to have from a go-fast point, then even yet today for a collector. Then starting in 1971 and for the next 20-plus years, the government imposed emission regulations on all auto makers forcing them to lower compression in their engines as well as horsepower. The downward spiral of horsepower ratings in cars I am sure had an effect on new car sales but also at the drag strip scene. I for one think there is a direct correlation between not being able to order a new car with a real high performance engine starting in 1971 and people starting to build street rods. The street rod hobby came on quite strong in 1971 all over the country, and I was one of those starting to build my own cars with engines the way I wanted. Now in the last few years, horsepower has come back in new cars largely due to public demand. Who doesn't like the feeling of acceleration?

As I was visiting with Ron "Gunner" Havens, I found out he was also a Sioux Falls native growing up in the same 1960s as I did; a typical teenager then playing with real cars. After graduating from Washington High School in 1966, he and a buddy joined the Marines, and ended up doing a tour in Vietnam, hence his "Gunner" nick name. After coming back to America through the West Coast, Ron planted himself in California through a cousin where the job opportunities were knowingly better than in South Dakota. Dare I say they still are? Ron said the jobs were plentiful and eventually landed one as a new car transport delivery driver. The occupation was good for Ron taking him all over the West Coast, but the demanding job never really left any time for himself. So after 30 years of pounding the pavement, Ron decided to retire and move back to South Dakota to be near his mother who passed two years later. Being in a better position and back in South Dakota now, he could finally focus on some of his past dreams of having an old car. He said one day he found a 1970 El Camino on eBay for sale in Boulder, Nevada. Ron called his cousin in California, who is now a 1970 Chevelle specialist who introduced Ron to that year of Chevelle liking, to see if he had seen the ad. His response was that he thought it looked pretty good with the extra pictures that were online and that Ron should buy it because of the price. Ron still thought he should fly out to see the car before buying it, but time wasn't working well because of a long-time planned up-coming motorcycle trip on Route 66. And then an hour later the same day by a mere coincidence, a buddy of Ron's had just landed in the Las Vegas airport and called to chat a bit. After a little visiting, Ron's buddy agreed to go check the car out immediately for him since it was in a nearby suburb of Vegas. Ron's buddy called back a couple hours later telling him the El Camino was a frame-off restoration and looked mint with nothing wrong. So with that Ron pressed the sold button on eBay and started lining up delivery to get it to South Dakota since he would be leaving soon. With all anyone could do, the El Camino wouldn't get delivered until the same day everyone was leaving on the long awaited motorcycle trip. As it turned out, relatives came over, watched it get unloaded, and put it in the garage, all while razzing Ron over the phone later wanting to drive it for him while he was gone. There was a firm no and leave it alone!! So after 6,000 miles in 24 days on a motorcycle, as soon as Ron got back home, still in leathers, the El Camino was fired up and taken for a test

drive. I have to say that Ron was not disappointed with the great looking outward appearance, and the 450 horse 383 stroker engine, the 700-R4 AOD trans with 4.11 posi that put a grin on his face that hasn't gone away since. Old dreams can happen!! It might just take longer.

