

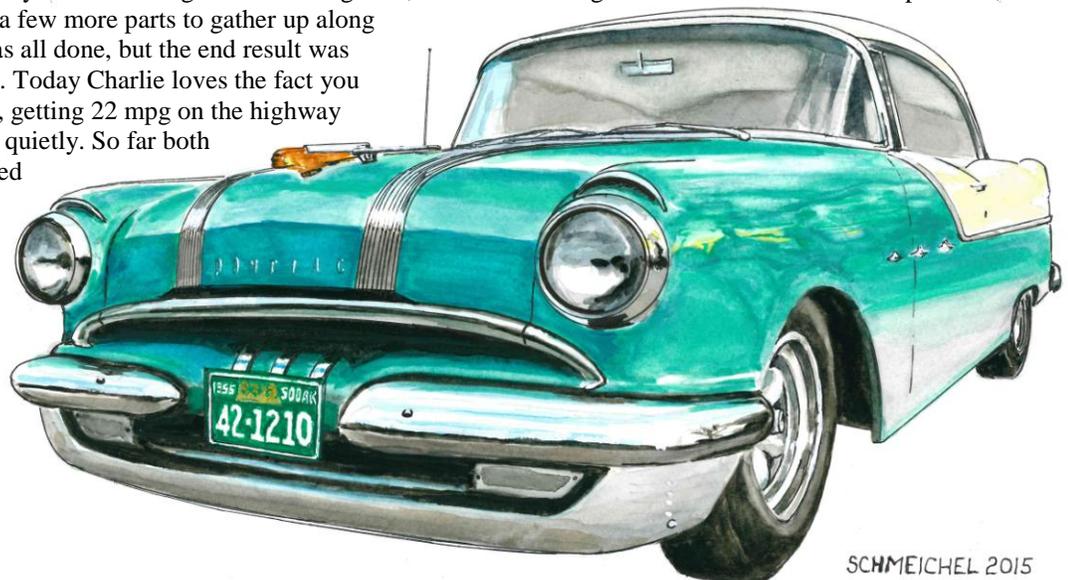
Perseverance to Bold and Beautiful Satisfaction

By Bob Schmeichel

I think you can honestly say that most people into cars 40- to 50-plus years ago drove the life out of whatever kind of vehicle they had at the time. The new found independence of driving as a teenager was left to our imagination with no regard to how nice what we were driving was then. Thoughts of driving a car sensibly were not on a priority level. Whether it was in town or in the country, the constant adrenalin rush for acceleration was at our command under a person's right foot. Yet in the back of our minds, we knew there was always the uncertain possibility of being caught by a city policeman or highway patrol officer for doing anything illegal while entertaining ourselves or others. Taking off out of a drive-in restaurant, the Barrell Drive Inn for instance, and squealing your tires while leaving tire marks on the road as you left was kind of the thing to do 50 years ago. Some still do it today for attention chancing the possibility of getting an exhibition or speeding ticket and having their insurance cost go up or even coverage dropped. Anyone having fun that way learns quickly it can be expensive. Being older and wiser today, I understand the cars are what originally brought us together, but now it's the people and friendships that keep bringing us back. As Charlie Hollingshead was telling me about his early fun with cars, it felt only too familiar to what we all had done in our younger years. Charlie said he had always regretted later in life about beating on a really nice 1955 Pontiac he had when he was 16. His early fun-thrashing on cars taught him a lot about mechanics, which evolved into a lifelong career as a certified mechanic as he still is today, starting in 1969 at Soo Import and working the last 31 years at Billion Toyota.

Little did Charlie know after building quite a few cars over the years that a '55 Pontiac would spark his interest again. In the spring of 2009 while skimming through the internet cars-for-sale ads, he saw one advertised and all the fun, old memories of the '55 Pontiac he had at 16 came rolling back. He called the owner that same evening about the ad and was informed that all the bodywork was done and the car was pretty much ready to paint. Enthused about what the owner was saying, Charlie told him to hang on to the car for another day and he'd be right down there to look at it. So the following morning, Charlie and his buddy, Jim Stansberry, went to Clinton, Iowa, to check it out. As the owner had told Charlie, the car appeared to have all the body work done with all of the trim pieces still attached to the car or inside the interior. Happy about what he saw and the story that the owner gave them, the car was on the trailer in no time and on its way back to Sioux Falls. After a couple of nights of looking at the car and planning in his mind what he was going to do with it, Charlie finally tore into it disassembling it in order to bring it up to today's standards while going more in a hot rod cruiser direction. To his discouragement as he started taking the car apart right down to the bare frame, he discovered that he was grossly misled about all of the body work which was done with aluminum tape and Bondo'd over. It was totally not done correctly in any way, shape or form by today's standards to last. The more he took it apart, the more rust he found. Most everyone who came by to see how he was doing on his new project and after seeing the rust told him, "Don't bother with fixing the car up as it was too far gone!" Those kinds of comments never stopped from the beginning, which only made Charlie more determined to see this car through to the end. Charlie did mention with chasing down parts cars and parts over a five-year period, along with some pieces coming from as far away as Albuquerque, New Mexico, there was way more than one occasion where he was ready to put the car in the driveway and start it on fire. After much discouragement, by the time Charlie finally got the body to where it was acceptable to him with doing all the bodywork, framework and some paint, he had replaced the hood, both front fenders, both doors, the whole roof grafting another one on at the pillars, parts of the interior floors, inner trunk floor, and part of the frame. New glass and interior finished out the body.

Next the fun part began with buying a 1995 Buick Roadmaster and adapting the entire drive train (LT-1 engine, AOD trans and rearend) into the old Pontiac frame. He also installed a Fat-Man Mustang II front suspension with power rack and pinion and disc brakes. There was a learning curve to this yet with making it all come together, but Charlie being a mechanic with a ton of experience, understood this part totally. There were a few more parts to gather up along the way and/or get chromed before it was all done, but the end result was worth what he went through to get there. Today Charlie loves the fact you can touch the key and the car is running, getting 22 mpg on the highway while rolling down the road smooth and quietly. So far both Charlie and his wife, Sandy, have enjoyed the new, old Pontiac cruising to the Black Hills, Back to the Fifties event in St Paul, and to the Vintiques Rod Run in Watertown last fall while finding new friends and creating new memories along the way. This may sound a little bit sentimental, but I think sharing this is the part of life with friends that can't get any better and is just short of having grandchildren to share it with.



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