

## *Intrigued From Early On*

By Bob Schmeichel

From my era, most young kids growing up on a farm worked harder and learned faster about things put in front of them in the country than city kids. I learned to drive at 10 years of age, barely seeing over the steering wheel. Besides doing everyday assigned chores, hunting, fishing, building things, and mechanical abilities almost came naturally. When it came to repairing some piece of machinery to keep it going, you were usually right there beside your dad learning or figuring it out by yourself, how something came apart, what was wrong, and how it went back together. I remember my mother telling me about myself taking a bird house apart at 3 years of age, so I could see what was inside. It is funny how we remember what we did when we were young and how we used what we learned as we became adults. For some of us, it became a progression into life as we did what was passionate to us enabling us to make a living doing what we considered fun. And many times over the years I have heard people say, "If you love what you are doing for work, then it's not work at all." I think we all know that is not always true, but hopefully the good outweighs the bad to make all worthwhile.

Rick Petersen is one of those guys who loved the challenges of doing mechanical repair work at a young age and over the years has evolved into a well versed auto mechanic in all directions. One of his first major jobs was working for the maintenance department as a mechanic at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion. Quite often the value of a job like this is under rated because everything is being taken care of on a daily basis behind the scenes and away from the public eye. Many people do not realize how quickly any business would fail in any aspect if it did not have people like Rick working, keeping it going 24/7. Twelve years into his job at USD, Rick saw an opportunity working with the Department of Transportation and improving his income. Before that could happen, Rick attended Southeast Area VoTec while working full time yet and earned a degree in Applied Science in Civil Engineering. This effort got him into a different and better position that was a good move for him. It evolved into planning out and following through with future work done on roads, ditches and bridges that carried him to retirement.

As Rick's decided retirement date neared, both he and his wife, Betsy, thought it would be fun to have a classic car to work on and drive once he got there. They both sifted and searched through the paper ads religiously as well as online advertisements seeing a few cars that grabbed their interest, yet nothing leaving an impression that they really could get serious about. Rick was hoping to find '49 Mercury or a '55 Chevy. After weeks of chasing down and checking out leads on other makes of cars that weren't what Rick was looking for, both Rick and Betsy decided to hold off for a few days before they made a decision about getting something different. Doing this was on their side and two days later a 1955 Chevy was found advertised for sale south of Canton. Rick said as soon as he turned into the long driveway of the farm where the car was located, the '55 Chevy with its new paint job lit up and glowed in the sun. After a short test drive and an agreed upon price, they were taking the '55 home with them.

Rick said they have had the car for about three years now and have enjoyed every minute of both working on the car and driving it. Even the grandkids who lovingly nicknamed the old Chevy "Ruby" can't wait to go for rides whenever they can. Because Rick has always been a mechanic with a make-it-last attitude and wanting to make the car his own, he started in the front installing disc brakes with a matching dual master cylinder. Then he replaced the 327 that came in the car with a new HO 350 crate engine and at the same time installed a new Saginaw 4-speed transmission. After that he freshened up all the rear end innards along with adding 3.08 posi., and finished up underneath with installing new rear springs and shocks all around. He also changed out the wheels the car came with for new old-school Cragar SS chrome 5-spoke mag wheels, as they were the hot wheels to have back in the 60s and still look good today. He said someone keyed the passenger side of the '55 paint job last summer. (I would have a hard time not taking someone's head off if I saw them keying any car.) About two weeks after that a rear tire blew out causing more paint damage on the passenger side. He has since then had all that fixed and is back on the road driving the '55 and smiling again. Rick said he would like to redo the interior to update it and change the 4-speed to a 5-speed to slow the engine down a bit for better mileage. Time will tell, but knowing Rick it won't be long.



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