

Four-Wheel Addiction

By Bob Schmeichel

Some of us, myself included, are cursed and thought of by others as having love affairs with things that we drive. I am not sure why the allure is stronger for some than others, but having a specific vehicle to project what might be perceived as part of your personality can easily come off appearing that way. For those of us who work to have our dream cars become reality, the love and attention our rides get when finished is what makes us tick along with the new memories that happen because of them.

At the age of 14, Ron Friedbauer bought his first car, a 1946 Ford coupe, in 1961. Ron found out at an early age that there was always another car or truck that grabbed his attention more than what he had, which has sort of happened all through his life. And this is where Ron's story starts. In 1962, the '46 Ford was sold in order to purchase a 1940 Ford coupe. Then in late 1962, the '40 Ford coupe was sold in favor of a 1957 Plymouth two-door sedan with a V-8. Ron was starting a pattern of buying and selling cars for himself based on what was popular to drive at the time. Even though he was happy with what he had, there was always the pull of the next vehicle. In 1963 he sold the '57 Plymouth to purchase a 1956 Chevy two-door sedan, which was with him until 1964 when he sold it in favor of a 1955 Chevy. Most all of the time Ron did all the work on his cars learning along the way what worked and what didn't. The '55 Chevy was one of his favorite cars that he installed a 301 engine in it to go fast with. He probably had this car the longest leaving it behind when he enlisted in the Air Force in 1966. Without getting into too much detail, Ron told me his first wife crashed the '55 Chevy in 1969. So after getting out of the service in 1970, Ron replaced all front crashed sheet metal on the '55 and pulled out the 301 to keep for a later date in time for another car. The '55 Chevy body was sold shortly thereafter and enabled Ron to buy a newer car. It was a 1966 Nova with a 327 and 4-speed. Even though it was a fast car, Ron needed more speed. So in 1971, the Nova was traded for a 1967 Camaro with a 427 and 4-speed, which ran in a B/ Modified Production class at Thunder Valley. With the speed need met, Ron realized he still needed to have a daily driver. This led him to purchasing a 1957 Chevy Bel Aire wagon that he installed his saved 301 Chevy engine into. This wagon was used for quite a few years as main transportation while going back and forth to work with as well as attending Sioux Falls College at the same time. It was a good-running, dependable car. Work for Ron then was steady with long hours and usually expanded more to do with his work load than he expected. Changing occupations gave his life back to him making Ron feel good about his newly chosen direction to bring home a pay check

In 1996 when Ron was a little more comfortable and settled in with life, he bought a 1962 Chevy two-door sedan that he decided to restore. It was a 41,000-original-mile car with a six cylinder and powerglide trans. The car was so nice body-wise that the only thing Ron did to make it more user friendly was to change the drive train of the car over to a new 350 crate engine and 350 turbo trans. It was a gorgeous car when finished that he added Weld wheels and drove religiously until he sold it in 2009. It seems that Ron is one of those guys who likes to have more than one project going on at the same time because of old work habits. After getting the '62 Chevy done, Ron bought and sold a red and white 1956 Pontiac two-door wagon in 2001. And again in 2003, Ron bought a 1964 Chevy Bel Aire wagon. Pushing himself when he wasn't working, he freshened the entire car up in less than a year and sold it in 2004 only to buy another '64 wagon with an Oldsmobile name tag on it. During the rebuild of the Olds wagon and before he sold it, Ron bought a 1981 Chevy El Camino in 2006. After selling the Olds, the El Camino received the same treatment that Ron gave all his projects and was gone in 2008. After that Ron bought a couple more El Caminos, a 1985 and 1981, which took up the better part of the next four years. Talk about drive to do projects, I'm getting tired just trying to keep track of the vehicles as he is telling me about them and the order they happened in for one guy to do... and there is way more to this story but that is another time. I know that priorities change as we get older, but my hat is still definitely off to Ron for his achievements with cars.

This brings us to Ron's present car, which is really out of character for him and the drive he has had the last 50-plus years with all the cars he has done. He found the car on internet in 2009. It was a 1961 Chevy two-door sedan with a freshly built 468 Chevy Big Block, a 700R4 trans and completely done. The owner had this '61 Chevy and a 80s-something Chevelle drag car. The owner's wife told him that one of the cars had to go. As it turned out, Ron loved the car right away because it was different than others he had built or had, and realized he could not duplicate it for the selling price. Ron said he felt guilty buying the car for the asking price, but knew if he didn't, someone else would. So since buying this car, Ron has truly enjoyed just turning the key and driving it.

Ron mentioned since buying this car in its done form, he has slowed down a bit. Yet I find it hard to believe that this story won't continue on since Ron

has a 1964 Ford Falcon wagon in his garage today as I am writing this story. No pressure to finish it now, Ron!



SCHMEICHEL 2014