

Sweet Memories

By Bob Schmeichel

One of my favorite things to do when I was a kid riding in a car was standing up on the floor in front of the rear seat to see where we were going. There was usually a rope attached to the back of the front seats in most all 50s cars to hang on to, so it wasn't hard. Keep in mind this was way before seat belts came into the picture, so there were no laws broken then. So with watching where we were going, I loved challenging anyone in the car to see how quick we could guess what kind of car was coming at us in the other lane. Because I was far sighted at a young age, and most cars from the 50s were easily identifiable from a front view, I could guess the car brand way before it got close enough for anyone else to recognize, even my dad.

Archie Dunham was enjoying a warm day driving on the old Brandon road in the summer of 1999 when he spied an old, recognizable Mercury setting way back in a grove of trees as he passed by. Capturing his interest, he slowed down and went back to the farm where the trees and car were to see if he could speak to someone about it. After knocking on the door for a few minutes with no one at home, he left feeling a little discouraged. The next day Archie climbed into his '56 Ford and went to a car show in Dell Rapids. While he was at the car show, he noticed a woman handing out for-sale flyers as she was walking around. After Archie read the one that was handed to him, he noticed 1956 Mercury and stopped the woman immediately to question her about it. As it turned out, it was the same car in the same location that he had stopped to see about the day before. Not wanting to miss out on a chance to see the car up close, he told the woman he would be over right after the car show. After the show as he drove to the farm, his thoughts were about having a '56 Mercury again as he had when he was a teenager. They were happy times with sweet memories that never went away. After getting to the farm and making their way out to the car, Archie was pleasantly surprised to see the car was in excellent shape and totally complete. The woman told Archie that the car ran but she had lost the title with her move back to South Dakota after her divorce. Archie asked what she knew about the car's history and the story began. She apparently had all the original sales papers on the car that was originally purchased by the Hall Grain Company in 1956 in Acheron, Colorado. It was purchased and used as a salesman's car to sell seed products out of for the Hall Grain Company. The car was driven by a salesman until 1967 then retired by the family rather than trading it off for another car. Now here is the fun part of this story. The Hall family liked the car so much that they stored it inside and used it regularly as a "golf cart" hauling four people around the golf course next door to the grain business with their clubs in the trunk for the next 15 years. I don't think that could happen on a golf course today. Eventually, they stopped using the old Mercury, which was later purchased by the now present owner and her husband living in the same area of Colorado. After a couple years, the present owner and her husband got a divorce, which led her and the Mercury back to South Dakota to be near family. Archie noticed the car still had 1967 Colorado plates, which intrigued him more about her story. After asking her about the price for the car, Archie told her it was a little more than he wanted to spend on the car, but that he was interested and left it at that. A week later, Archie made her what he thought was a fair offer for the car with the understanding she had to find the title. She accepted. The next day Archie had Jim and Ron's towing haul the car to his house. Archie spent a couple days cleaning it up and installed a new battery. To his amazement, the car fired right up and ran great.

Over the next few weeks Archie put on a new set of tires and started rebuilding everything mechanical himself. It took awhile, but eventually he got a title making him feel more at ease about moving forward with restoring this gorgeous, old Mercury. With all the original old paper work pertaining to the Mercury, Archie called the Hall family in Colorado and in speaking to the son, had everything verified that the woman had told him. Archie told the Hall's son that the story sounded a little far-fetched until he found a bunch of golf tees and golf balls in the trunk, which led him to the phone call. The son was excited about Archie restoring the car because his father had bought the car new and wanted Archie to send him pictures of the car when it was done. Archie told him not a problem!! As time went on, Archie and his brother totally stripped the car of all the trim and paint. As you know, 1950s cars usually had lots of chrome or stainless trim on them to dress them up; this '56 Mercury was no exception with being the top-of-the-line model that year. Archie and his brother were both surprised at how little body work they had to do to ready the car for paint. Eventually, a friend that Archie had met at a car show, named Rich, painted the outside of the car. After that Archie polished all the stainless and chrome and

reinstalled it. He moved on to installing a new headliner, carpeting and interior finishing out the whole car, detailing everything out to look new.

Today Archie couldn't be happier with the Mercury that still has only 68,000 original miles on it. He said it rides like a Cadillac and has driven it to both "Back to the 50's" in St. Paul and to the Goodguys in Des Moines quite a few times while smiling all the way there and back.



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