

Old/New Memories Continued

By Bob Schmeichel

Some time around the early part of 1959, Jim Solheim's father bought a 1956 Ford Customline out of Minnesota that had been put through the paces and used as a police car. The car was a basic 4-door sedan but with a 312 Police Interceptor engine, dual exhaust and a 3-speed transmission with overdrive. The doors that were previously painted white were painted black like the rest of the car with it still retaining its original police added spot lights. Although the car was originally bought to be a family car, Jim first learned to drive with this car and eventually wound up driving it more than anyone else. Living on a farm, there are always chores to do or take care of before anything else could happen. I have always felt that farm kids grow up with being responsible for what is directly around them while kind of being sheltered from the rest of the world. Because of that Jim always looked forward to a break running to town for whatever was needed by his dad to keep the farm going, which usually involved driving the '56 Ford. Later as Jim got more acquainted with and braver about driving the '56 faster, he started to realize that it was faster than most cars in the area at the time. Jim noted it was easy to beat other cars from stoplight to stoplight in town, and if the challenge took them out in the country on the highway, shifting it into overdrive insured Jim would walk away from whoever thought they could beat him on the top end. Another thing he remembered doing as a pranky teenager then was driving down gravel roads in the country at night with his buddies and lighting up parked cars that romance was going on in with the spot lights on the '56. He said smiling, "It made a lot of people mad but if you had a fast car you could get away with it." Victoria, Jim's wife of almost 50 years, commented that they started dating in the car, too. As those innocent times went on, the car eventually got wore out and was traded for something newer. Jim also moved on and became a farmer himself as he still is today taking care of 1,000 acres and cattle at the same time. There is no rest for the living when it comes to having a farm. After Jim and Victoria raised a family and now with the kids on their own, the empty-nest syndrome set in. Feeling a little more at ease with their picture in life at that time, an idea came up between the two of them to recapture some of those earlier memories and see if they could get another '56 Ford again to do so. It's one of those great freedoms that comes with aging.

Then about three years ago while attending the Ford Car Show in Sioux Falls, Jim met Forest Conrad who had a really nice '56 Ford convertible on display. After a bit of small talk about their common likes about '56 Fords, Jim mentioned to Forest that he was kind of looking for another '56 Ford. Forest said he had a second '56 Ford he might be interested in selling sometime down the road. So Jim gave him his telephone number and left it at that. About a year later Forest called Jim back saying that his wife had lost interest in the '56 Ford Victoria he had built for her to drive and wondered if Jim was still interested. With that invitation, Jim and Victoria went to Yankton the next day to check it out. They were pleasantly surprised to see what had been done to the '56 Victoria to enable Forest's wife to drive it. It had been converted from a 3-speed overdrive trans to an automatic transmission, along with the addition of power steering and air conditioning. Jim said it was really hot that day so the air conditioning in the old Ford was a selling point for the test drive. The older two-tone paint combination looked gorgeous with the newly rechromed bumpers. It didn't take long and they were driving the car home and continue to drive it as much as they can since. Both Jim and Victoria both love the attention the car brings them, probably more now than so long ago. Jim said there is kind of an irony to the story about this car. Jim likes original cars that are all numbers matching, and since the '56 Victoria isn't all original, it has always kind of bugged him. Jim said he has known Archie Dunham, one of our car club members, for quite a few years. Jim said while visiting with Archie not too long ago, Archie admitted to buying the parts taken off the Jim's '56 Victoria when Forest did the conversion 20 some years ago.

Jim said to this day he is kind of biting at the bullet to buy the original parts back.

And then with Archie being a Ford collector, too – we'll have to see how this story unfolds, or not.



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