

**Feature Vehicle of the Month:
1988 Ford McLaren Mustang**

**Owned by
Sandy Skrbina**



Sandy knew she wanted to drive a convertible since that first drop top ride around the neighborhood when she was 10 years old. Then came the realization that the Ford Mustang was one of the coolest cars around – plus it came with the convertible option! When Sandy started working full time, the dream of a Mustang convertible started to take form.

In January 2004 she asked her good friend and neighbor, Garry, to keep his eyes open for a Mustang convertible to be purchased as a second car. While driving through the neighborhood, Gary spotted this beauty for sale. He and Sandy soon went for a test drive and sealed the deal the same day!

Sandy took possession of her car three days before the Woodward Dream Cruise last year and was thrilled to drive instead of “spectate” at the big event! Gary has given the car a great polish and only minor cosmetic changes are planned.

“One of my co-workers introduced me to the FMRCOA -- a great choice for a car club. With meetings and activities each month, the club provides a valuable and fun way to appreciate your car!” says Sandy.

Sandy spends her weekends and holidays cruising around in her Mustang, and her weekdays in front of a computer screen working at parts manufacturer Federal-Mogul Corporation in Southfield. There Sandy handles database software development and maintenance, operations tasks, and administrator issues for a customer rebate application.

Welcome to our club Sandy!

FMRCOA Scores at Barn Show!

Despite dire weather predictions, the 18th annual Barn Show in Livonia on June 12 was a success. The weather “held” and over 300 cars showed up. Goodie bags and dash plaques were given to the car registrants. The event is sponsored by Road Knights car club and the Friends of the Wilson Barn. Harry McAuliffe is a member of the Road Knights which is one of the oldest clubs in the area (51 years!) and one of the seven that form the MHRA. About 75% of the cars at the show came from within a five mile radius.



Club members “recruiting”

Continued on page 7

**FMRCOA Featured Member Profile:
Al Fontana**

“The bread in the German POW camp was so hard that I lost three fillings trying to eat it!” remarked Al Fontana as we sat together at the Barn Car Show and talked. I then asked Al to tell me more...



Al in WWII



Al Today

Al Fontana was born in Detroit on February 7, 1925. He grew up in Detroit and joined Ford Motor Company in 1941.

His stint at Ford was cut short by the war and he joined the Army in 1942. Al, a PFC in the 36th Division 5th Army under General Mark Clark, landed at Paestum on the Gulf of Salerno, South of Naples on September 9, 1943. There were 55,000 British & US troops

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The Rotunda Times



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P.O. Box 2938 Dearborn, Michigan 48123
www.fmrcoa.org

Newsletter Staff

Editor

Steve Rohde 734.995.8702 steve@quantumsignal.com
2955 Bateson Ct., Ann Arbor, MI. 48105

Associate Editor

Denise Rohde 734.327.1302 deniserohde@aol.com
3369 Pontiac Trail, Ann Arbor, MI. 48105

Display Ad Editor

Phil Lyon 734.422.0595 pjlyon39@peoplepc.com
34945 Elmira, Livonia, MI. 48150

Staff Contributors

Harry McAuliffe 313.534.5974
Phil Lyon 734.422.0595 pjlyon39@peoplepc.com
Vic Hollingshead 248.474.4356
Larry Swanson 248.474.3902 larryland@sbcglobal.net

Membership Roster Editor

Brian Saylor 248.486.8851 bsaylor22@charter.net

Club Historian

David Cheklich 248.391.3934 vidachek@juno.com

WEBMASTER

Jim Crawford 313.724.9117 jcrawfo1@fmrcoa.org



FMRC

**FORD AND MERCURY RESTORERS
CLUB of AMERICA**

P.O. Box 2938 • Dearborn, MI 48123

2005 OFFICERS

President	Bob Guetschow	248.328.9113
Vice President	Art Cervi	248.553.8897 ltc_acervi@yahoo.com
Secretary	Phil Lyon	734.422.0595 pjlyon39@peoplepc.com
Treasurer	Steve Rohde	734.717.5444 steve@quantumsignal.com
Director	John Hill	734.455.8611
Director	Mike Fontana	248.926.0160
Director	Doug Osborn	248.597.0940 dougosborn@wideopenwest.com

The Ford & Mercury Restorers Club is a hobby organization whose purpose is to foster and promote the acquisition, preservation and use of all Ford vehicles, 25 years of age and older.



Editors' Message

This month we've got more contributions from members including feature car pictures and articles such as the interesting Ranchero article by Dan Davis. Keep them coming! They will be used in the future. *Also, please let us know what you'd like to see in the newsletter.*

I had the privilege of interviewing Al Fontana at the Barn Show – what a story!

We had a letter to the editor from Norm Greig which we felt deserved its own spot. Norm needs help with 'Dearborn 2005.' **Please help him and the club out!**

Our club is really getting "brand recognition." Earlier this month my wife and I went to the Midland Antique Festival and Car Show. As I viewed the various vendor merchandise wearing an old Dearborn t-shirt, a vendor stopped me to ask if I was in the FMRC. When I replied affirmatively, he told me how happy he was to deal with Bob Guetschow, and excited about our swap meets. Nice feedback!

All members are encouraged to submit articles/letters as often as possible. Material should relate to the automotive hobby, transportation or related interests. You don't have to be a good writer either – we'll edit your stuff and it'll look great!

Thanks for your support!

Steve & Denise Rohde, Editors

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The FMRC Membership Advantage!!!!!!

Your Board officers and Editors take extra effort to bring you FREE Classifieds and Schedule of Events found within your monthly newsletter. Take advantage of these benefits your membership provides. Post your schedule where you can refer to it easily. Submit your ads at a meeting or mail to Phil Lyon your ad editor. For more information on becoming a member go to <http://www.fmrcoa.org/> or write to:

FMRC Membership Secretary

P.O. Box 2938

Dearborn MI 48123

Dues are \$25 before & \$30.00 after DEC 31



PRESIDENT'S PAGE

June 2005

On June 4th, Board member Doug Osborn represented the club at the Classic Auto Showplace benefit for little Mya, a 1 year old cancer victim. Doug reports to me that the car show went off well and that he presented the club sponsored trophies to the winning car owners. I feel the club got a lot of publicity bang for the buck. We thank Doug for participating as the representative of our club. I was unable to attend due to a trip to the All Ford Nationals in Carlisle Pa. I enjoy this meet because the car show, swap meet and the car corral are all Ford. I look for Lincoln parts and it sure cuts down on the search time because some of these Ford parts vendors have Lincoln items as well.

On June 12th, about twenty of our members registered for the Wilson Barn show in Livonia, Mike Fontana coordinated this event and reported to me that we had about twenty club cars registered and our members received five trophies: Teri Boegler with her beautiful 1957 T-Bird Convertible, Al Fontana with his nice 46 Ford Club Coupe, Bob Haase with his 1955 Sunliner, Phil Lyon with his 39 Ford Convertible and Jack Perkett with his 70 Ford Torino. The club kicked in for half the registration fee, and food and refreshments for the members who participated. I made it as a spectator and spent some time passing out a stack of swap meet flyers to the other spectators. Nice turn out guys and many thanks to Mike Fontana for another job well done.

I checked in on our walking wounded, Wally Wigand, Ed Goff, Bud Hassett, Dan Kirby, and Jim Underwood, and by what I am hearing they are all holding their own or hanging in there. Our best goes out to all of them and their continued progress.

I have to keep beating the drum for help with our swap meet, car show, and car corral. If you haven't volunteered for the work roster, as yet, please call Norm Grieg, at 734-432-5065, or Larry Swanson at 248-474-3902.

You can order your Dearborn '05 tee shirts from Mike Fontana at 248-926-0160, or see him at the next meeting. We would like to see every member get a shirt if they want one. Please no purchases for non-members until they go on sale at the swap meet. Price is \$10.00 for M-XL and 2X and larger.

I have secured Oxford Bowling lanes in Dearborn for parking during the new Telegraph cruise on July 30th. Oxford lanes is just South of Michigan ave. on the West side of Telegraph.

For those of you that didn't attend the June meeting I want to announce that I have arranged a Ford parts discount program with Varsity Ford Parts Manager, Joe Sabo, for our club members. Call Joe at 734-996-2300 ext. 274 for details.

Final plans are in place for the Dearborn Homecoming parade Friday

evening August 5th. There will be a catered meal and awards given by Mayor Guido at Ford Field after a parade through the neighborhood with our club cars and the Water Wonderland Thunderbird club. Call me for info or to register, Bob Guetschow at 248-328-9113.

I was concerned about the lagging sales of swap spaces at our June meeting, we were about 60 spaces behind last years pace. To remedy the situation I decided to send out reminder flyers to all unregistered vendors from the 2003 and 2004 swap meet lists, and as of this writing we are now running ahead of last years pace.

We will be crossing the T's and dotting the I's regarding the swap meet at the next meeting so...

Don't forget, the next meeting is July 6th at the K of C Hall at 8PM.

Till next time.

Bob Guetschow

WELCOME NEW AND RETURNING MEMBERS

New Members

Dirk Swanson

1443 Kensington Dr.
Canton, Mi. 48188
734-397-0020



James Shumaker (Evelyn)

1318 N. Altadena
Royal Oak, MI 48067
248-547-8691
1966 Mustang Coupe

Craig Brosch (Denise)

5893 Marshall
Dexter, MI 48130
734-730-2617
1955 Ford Victoria



YOUR CAR!

The Rotunda Times would like to feature your old car or truck in an upcoming issue. We are interested in how you came about finding your vehicle of choice, and what you have done to enhance its beauty, and / or mechanical condition. Simply mail or email us your article accompanied with a photo to:

PHIL LYON
pjlyon39@peoplepc.com
 ROTUNDA TIMES
 34945 Elmira
 Livonia Mi. 48150
 734.422.0595
 or
VIC HOLLINGSHEAD
 ROTUNDA TIMES
 21104 Robinson
 Farmington Hills, MI 48336
 248.474.4356

Club Meetings

The FMRC meets the first Wednesday of each month at the Knights of Columbus Patrick O'Kelley Hall in Dearborn (313.278.5600). Refreshments are served after the meeting!

Come and bring a friend!



Members Needed to Make 'DEARBORN 2005' One of the Best Meets in the Area!

By Norm Greig

We have big gaps in the afternoons of both Saturday and Sunday in the Traffic Control and Gate 1. A lot of our members want the early work spots to get their 2 hours in, so they can spend the rest of their time selling and buying. Having a swap space does not exempt any member from sharing in the work. That's just not how it works. We all need to do what we can to make this event work as well as possible. Like Bob Guetshow has said, "only once a year, this is the only time you as a member are asked to give something back to the FMRC by working 2 hours" (it should be 4 hours) at this event. Please don't leave this work to the same dedicated, hard working group of, FMRC member that always do more than their share to make this event better than the last one. Everyone goal should be to make our customers / guests, have a great experience at this years event, so that they will want to return next year. Please do your part and sign up, it will make it easier on all of us! **Please call Norm at 734.545.8881 or email him at ngreig@hotmail.com to volunteer.**

		Saturday	#	Sunday	#
		Times	Needed	Times	Needed
Field Setup	OK				
Information	OK				
Traffic	Needed	10 to 12	5	6 to 8	4
Control		12 to 2	5	12 to 2	5
		2 to 4	5	2 to 4	5
Gate 1	Needed	12 to 2	4	10 to 12	4
		2 to 4	3	12 to 2	4
				2 to 4	3
Gate 2	Needed			8 to 10	1
Car Corral	Needed			12 to 2	1
				2 to 4	1
Car Show	Needed	Only 7 members signed up!			
		Can't do a good job with 7 members!			
Cleanup	Needed	12 to 2	1	2 to 4	1
		4 to 2	2	4 to 6	4
TOTAL			25		33+

Table showing where volunteers are needed.

Swap Meet Shirts Go On Sale



Swap meet shirts will go on sale at the next club meeting. The cost will be \$10 for all sizes through XL and \$12 for XXL or bigger. If you can't make the meeting or want the shirts earlier, please call Mike Fontana at 248.926.0160.



June Meeting Minutes of the FMRCOA

June 1, 2005

The mini swap meet kept us entertained from around 6:00 until the meeting started. It was a success again, with about a dozen members bringing stuff to sell. I heard sales were OK. The parking lot started to look like a late 40's California drive-in with Phil Gadwell's beautiful '29 roadster (which looks as if it had been built in the 50's) Rick Jones' 1932 roadster, and a red '29 pickup. A few customs also enhanced the parking lot. Quite a few well restored Fords filled out the lot and made for some serious tire kicking. Keep bringing those beautiful cars guys. They were meant to be driven!

The June meeting was called to order by President Guetschow, and VP Cervi was immediately put in charge of the gavel. New members and guests were recognized. Mark Sapienz, a new member, has a



Our Distinguished June FMRCOA Meeting Attendees!

'53 Ford, and needs help with the upholstery. He was referred to Larry Swanson for advice. Ken Shoemaker has a '66 Mustang and was Doc Stanley's guest. Jim Crawford brought a guest with a 1941 pickup, but he had to leave early. Clara Mooradian took the count of members and guests present and we had 108 in attendance. Bob spoke of all of our members on the sick list and everyone wishes them well. They are Bud Hassett, Wally Wigand, Jim Underwood, and Dan Kirby.

It looks as if members will be on their own to find places to park for the Woodward Dream Cruise. All of Bob's efforts to find a place for the club to park together have met with problems. Dick Monroe stated that he will look into another possibility and will report back next meeting.

Ralph Hancox was presented with his certificate of appreciation and received a nice round of applause. The minutes and the treasurer's report from May were both officially accepted. At the May meeting Joe Newland asked for volunteers to paint some doors for Habitat

for Humanity. Bob Haas reported that several members showed up to help and sixty doors got painted, and the guys had a good time doing it.

Al Orloff reported on the Memorial Day parade and said it was a success. Brian Saylor says that our membership is now up to 264. We may need someone to pick up the leadership in organizing this year's poker run. Jim Underwood may not be up to the task. We also still need a volunteer to oversee the Dearborn Homecoming parade. On the positive side, Art Cervi has again agreed to host the overnigher. Steve Rohde asked for volunteers to bring their cars to a 40th Pioneer High School class reunion on July 23 at the Sheraton Hotel in Ann Arbor.

Plans are well underway for our swap meet. Ron Gossett has agreed to help George Patrick with the gate, and Pat Stanecki will honcho the field setup again.



Joe Sabo of Varsity Ford at Club Meeting

Make sure to sign up on the work roster as soon as possible.

Dave Gutierrez and Joe Sabo were our speakers for the evening. Dave talked to us about the upcoming Telegraph Cruise, and Joe, parts manager from Varsity Ford, spoke to us about a parts discount plan.

We had some brief car talk , our 50-50 drawing, a very interesting show and tell session, and then we adjourned and made our way to the kitchen.

Respectfully submitted,
Phil Lyon. Secretary



A Note from the Treasurer

All's well here! Swap Meet transactions are starting to escalate -- as expected! We are also in the process of evaluating various cd offerings for club funds to get higher returns.

**Steve Rohde,
Treasurer**

FMRCOA Featured Member Profile, ct'd. from page 1

involved there with a 115,000 troop follow-up. The waiting enemy launched counterattacks, but the 36th advanced slowly, securing the area from Agropoli to Altavilla. "We fought 7 days and 7 nights," said Al, "and at least 1500 soldiers were killed on both sides. There were bodies everywhere." The 36th then captured Mount Maggiore, Mount Lungo, and the village of San Pietro despite strong enemy positions. This grueling campaign was marked by futile attempts to establish a secure bridgehead across the Rapido River.

"We spent about 3 weeks in the mountains, and then another 2 weeks fighting at the Rapido River," said Al. "The current in the river was unbelievably strong and the river banks were all mined," he continued. Al was hit in his "posterior" by mortar, and till today has about a 2 inch piece of shrapnel embedded there.

It was then that Al and about 1500 fellow American GI's were taken prisoner. The Germans marched



German POW Camp Stalag IIB

them for about 5-6 miles through a German town where the people spat and threw things at them. Al was then put in Camp Stalag IIB together with about 20,000 other prisoners.

"The place was crummy inside. It smelled real bad. We swept it before we could put our stuff down....And the food was terrible." Al spent about two years as a POW at Stalag IIB. There he met fellow American,



German guards in action

British, and Russian prisoners. Near the end of his stay there he saw a Russian plane land, verify that his group

was American, and then take off and blow up German tankers. Al's POW camp was close to a concentration camp and he remarks, "You could smell the fresh burnt flesh. There's no doubt that these atrocities happened – despite what some now claim." Al and his fellow prisoners were then placed on a "black march," walking for about two months in circles through German towns where they were harassed. They were then liberated by an American tank division and taken to Camp Lucky Strike in France. At Camp Lucky Strike, one of the "cigarette" camps that served as staging areas

for new US troops arriving, Al was well fed and cared for. He was then shipped back to the US and received a Purple Heart.

Al returned to work as a machinist at Ford in 1945 and retired in 1983. He married Lucille, his "bride" of 59 years, in 1946. Al has four children: Mike, Rosemary, George, and Vince; and seven



Camp Lucky Strike



Al with his beautiful 1946 Ford

grandchildren. It is gratifying to see the love and respect that his family has for him!

Al's first car was a 1931 Model A convertible. Among the other cars that he has owned are a

1936 Ford, a 1938 Buick, a 1949 Mercury, and a 1955 Ford. He currently owns a 1946 Ford that he restored about 10 years ago. That car has won numerous awards including "Outstanding in Class" at today's Barn show! Al joined the FMRCOA in 1992. It's great to have him as a member!

Steve Rohde



**New Seatbelts!
Contributed by Denise Rohde**



2005 FMRC Meetings & Events Calendar

Below is the table of meetings & events for 2005. New information will be posted each month as events and dates are “firmed” up. **Bold font represent club functions.**

July 6	Club Meeting
July 16,17	FMRCOA Swap Meet and Car Show
July 24	Club Picnic
August 3	Club Meeting
August 5-7	Dearborn Homecoming TBA
August 13	Poker Run
August 20	Woodward Dream Cruise
Sept. 3-5	Overnighter TBA
Sept. 7	Club Meeting
Sept. 9-11	Frankenmuth Auto Fest
Sept. 18	Somewhere in Time –Trenton, MI
Sept. 18	Scholz Auto Fest
Oct. 5	Club Meeting
Oct. 16	Color Tour
Nov. 2	Club Meeting
Dec. 3	Dinner Dance
Dec. 7	Club Meeting
Dec. 10	Christmas Walk-Greenfield Village



FMRCOA Scores at Barn Show, ct'd. from page 1

The show also had a very “eclectic” swap meet associated with it. Here I managed to buy an old tabletop coin operated telephone – something I’d never seen before! Also, there were a number of other vendors at the show that displayed interesting products including EGO Swimwear!

FMRCOA was well represented at the show thanks to Mike Fontana! We had 20 club members show up and about 10 guests. We did very well in terms of awards – receiving five awards:

- Teri Boegler: “Outstanding Award” for her 1957 T-Bird Convertible
- Al Fontana: “Outstanding in Class” for his 1946 Club Coupe
- Bob Haase: “Best in Class” for his 1955 Sunliner
- Phil Lyon: “Top 10 Pre-1948 Cars” for his 1939 Ford Convertible
- Jack Perkette: “Outstanding Award” for his 1970 Torino

Congratulations guys!



Don't forget the Poker Run on August 13! Please call Bev or Jim Underwood to register at 734.722.7195.

Please participate in these events!

Telegraph Cruise Discussed at the June Meeting



At the June FMRCOA meeting Dave Gutierrez discussed the upcoming July 30th first annual Telegraph car cruise. Cruzin' Telegraph is a classic car cruise along Telegraph Road in Taylor, Dearborn Heights, Dearborn and Redford. Its scope and support continue to grow and it builds upon a Telegraph cruising legacy that started over 30 years ago! The event is to be an opportunity to show off classic cars and enjoy a fun, safe family day that is free to attend. The towns through which the cruise is going are very supportive of it. For example, in Taylor the Cruzin' Telegraph in Taylor route offers many spaces to park and display cars during the event.



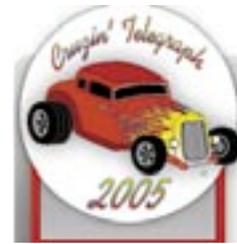
Dave Gutierrez at Meeting

FMRCOA has secured spots at the Oxford Bowling lanes in Dearborn for parking during the cruise on July 30th. Oxford lanes is just South of Michigan ave. on the West side of Telegraph.

Telegraph Road was chosen because it, like Woodward, is a famous Detroit area highway with a long history. The vast majority of an early route from Toledo, Ohio to Dixie Hwy in Waterford Twp is known as Telegraph Rd. The road was so named due to the telegraph lines running alongside the road for a great distance more than a century ago. Telegraph Road was an excellent choice for the lines, as it runs in a straight line for long distances, and, as we all know, the shortest distance between two points is a straight line! Michigan's Telegraph Road is not unique, however, as many other Telegraph Roads exist or once existed around the country.

Telegraph Road was laid out in 1925 and the section between 7 Mile Road and Square Lake Road was completed in 1930. In 1944 what would become ALT US-24 was completed from Ohio, 5 miles south of Erie, northerly to US-25 at Erie, then northeasterly along US-25/South Dixie Hwy to M-151/Luna Pier Rd, then west for 0.6 mile to end at US-24/Telegraph Rd. Initially, this route was signed as ALT US-25. However, in 1946 the route of ALT US-25 in southern Monroe County was re-designated as ALT US-24.

US-24 in Michigan exists as an exception to the standard US Highway numbering scheme. Even-numbered US highways were laid out to run east-west, while odd-numbered routes run north-south. Outside Michigan, US-24 is indeed an east-west highway. However, since the route within Michigan runs from Toledo on the south to Clarkston on the north, MDOT has (rightfully) signed this highway as a north-south route. Some question as arisen as to the precise northern terminus of US-24 in Oakland Co as the actual "US-24 ENDS" route marker assembly



on northbound Dixie Hwy sits north (past) the I-75 interchange. What these "ENDS" signs more accurately indicate is the end of the state trunkline highway (and, therefore, state-funded maintenance) rather than the end of the US-24 route. While it is odd for route terminus signage to be configured in this manner, it is very common for state maintenance on a particular roadway to extend for hundreds of yards or even a half-mile beyond what would be considered the terminus for the route designation. (For more historical information about Telegraph Road, please see www.michiganhighways.org/listings/MichHwys20-29.html#US-024.)

There are two separate routes for Cruzin' Telegraph. The first route runs from Van Born Road north through Dearborn Heights, Dearborn and end at Plymouth Road in Redford. The second route runs through Taylor from just north of Eureka Road to just south of Ecorse Road. Signage will be posted in the City of Taylor to assist in guiding cruisers through the route.

Cruzin' Telegraph looks like it'll be a lot of fun! I plan to attend and hope other FMRCOA members will too! (For info updates on the cruise, please see <http://www.cruzintelegraph.com/index>.)



"Northern" Route



"Southern" Route



Sip n' Nip on Telegraph



Steve Rohde

Ranchero Found, Sanity Lost

by
Dan R. Davis

Most of the years that I remember, I have been a motorhead, on a quest of some kind. Before I had my driver's license, I had a 1929 Model A Ford. When I did get my license, I needed something more roadworthy. My parents let me get a 1962 Corvair. It served me well for a couple of years, but we figured I'd need something better for the 120-mile drive to the university. So I found a good-looking 1964 ½ Mustang in the paper. This really got me interested in the mid 60's Fords (this was in late '69). I had friends with Falcons and Fairlanes, but one that really stuck in the back of my mind was a little white 64 or 65 Falcon Ranchero. Many years later after I completed the restoration of the Mustang mentioned above, I wanted a Ranchero to go with it. I found a couple different places on vacations and business trips, but with 2 Mustangs in the garage, I was running out of room.



Dan's Ranchero

The insanity of another vehicle kept building inside me, checking Old Cars Weekly listings and Trader Online, but luckily most of these were out of my reach. Then in the Spring of 2001, I had mentioned to a friend in the Ford Motorsports Enthusiasts that I was looking for a Ranchero. With their international membership, she forwarded the description of my preferences to their members. Basically, I wanted a body in decent shape, with any of the available powertrains (I figured I could swap it out and make whatever I wanted). Several weeks passed and I had all but forgotten that I had even put out a request to this person, when one day she forwards me the extended version of my Email, with a trail that led me to within 50 miles of my parents' home. Seems an FME member at the Tulsa Glass Plant, knew someone, that had a neighbor.... That had a 65 Ranchero. They had some pretty basic info (features, price, powertrain) in the note, so I let my fingers do the walking. The owner didn't sound like a really "motivated" seller and couldn't tell me much more than the notes said, or send me pictures. I said I'd check back the next time I came to Oklahoma, planning on making a Christmas trip. But my Mother had a sick spell and I went back home in the fall for a week to see how she was doing. She felt well enough that we wanted to

go for a drive that weekend, so I called and got directions to where the owner of the Ranchero was. We found the truck, sitting in a backyard, with 3 flat tires and leaves in the back end. It had a 260 V8 and C4 automatic (that was a real leaker), and a less than flattering Crown Vic blue split flight bench seat, with a Mustang floor shifter. At least the dual exhaust did give it a nice exhaust note. And it was the proverbial rust free Oklahoma truck, but the interior did have a lot of dry rot to it. The magic of Old Car-Itis was working on me. The details of what all transpired is not clear, but I do remember somewhere in the conversation saying, "Yeah, 2 grand sounds pretty fair". Later, a spare transmission and a large box of extra parts, mostly from Dennis Carpenter, were hauled down from the top of the garage, and sweetened the deal by another \$400. Luckily I had my "spare" money with me.

The truck hadn't been driven in 3 or 4 years, so we figured it wouldn't be safe to try to drive it back to my parents' house, so we went home and got one of my Dad's friends with a good solid equipment trailer. We got it home and rolled into his shop just at sundown. I bought \$20 worth of gas and pizza for everyone to celebrate my find. Alas, I returned to Michigan the next day and didn't get to do much with my new found friend. Since I was not in the company of my wife on this trip, I neglected to give her all the details of this little excursion when I got home. A few weeks later, at another club meeting some of the discussion was about my new "toy". She was beginning to get suspicious. So that night I told her I had something to tell her, and I confessed to her about my new "friend". She was relieved to her that it was the Ranchero, not a girlfriend. So the Ranchero has been dubbed the "Mistress in the Barn" by the other club members. (It still doesn't set too well with the wife though.) Now that I have retired, I have plans to do an engine swap to a little stronger 289 and a better transmission. But it still is in the shop in Oklahoma, since I don't have room for it here. I only get to see my "Mistress" on special occasions.

June Show & Tell Diverse

At the meeting we had a 1920-1980 car spotters guide that Mark Sapienz brought in for us to see.

Stu Dingman showed off a collection of cap guns from the 1940's and 1950's. there were about 27 guns in four display cases in the collection.



Try to remember to bring something to show us next month.

Harry McAuliffe

Birth of the Ford Thunderbird

The Ford Thunderbird nameplate started in Paris nearly a half-century ago. Two men, Louis D. Crusoe and George Walker, were primarily responsible for the birth of the Thunderbird. Both were devoted to the automobile and its constant development and refinement.

Crusoe, a millionaire lured out of retirement by Henry Ford II, was a businessman with a solid “feel” for the automobile market. As a Ford vice president and Ford Division general manager, it was his responsibility to strengthen a young Ford Division. His goal was to give it a car that breathed excitement, a car that would add prestige to the Ford name.

Walker, later a Ford vice president and chief stylist, is described by contemporaries as a “stylist with the soul of an artist burning in his heart.”

It was October 1951. With their mission in mind, the two men were walking along the aisles of the Grand Palais in Paris when Crusoe gestured toward one of the sportier automobiles on display, turned to Walker and asked:

“Why can’t we have something like that?”

“We have a job just like that in the works right now,” was Walker’s quick response. It was not quite so, until Walker found it convenient to get



1955 Thunderbird

to a telephone and talk with his aides back in Dearborn. But, by the time Crusoe returned to the United States, there was indeed a “job just like that” in the works.

In the months that followed, there was a lot of talk about a “true Ford sports car.” All hands had been instructed to go to work on a completely new Ford car for the 1955 model year.

Official approval of a crash program to develop the Ford sports car came in a product letter dated Feb. 9, 1953. May 1, 1953, was set as the target date for a full-size clay model. The letter also authorized parallel work by the engineers on a suitable chassis. The initial guidelines called for a two-passenger, canvas-topped open car that “would make maximum use of standard production components.” Design objectives included a weight of 2,525 pounds, an Interceptor V-8 engine, a balanced weight distribution, acceleration better than the competition, and a top speed of more than 100 miles per hour.

The new Ford sports car also was “to retain Ford product characteristics and identification to the extent necessary for a ready association with the standard production car.” With no time for scale-model studies and the like, the first sports car styling suggestions were full-profile, full-sized air-brush renderings on paper of five different cars, cut out and mounted so they could be viewed like automobiles on the highway. None of these proposals led directly to a final car, but each provided ideas for the full-size clay model that was taking shape.

While the clay model was being developed, other decisions were being made:

* The grille design would be a combination of the typically Ford arched upper shape and a Ferrari-style, egg-crate mesh.

* For cost reasons, the new car would use the same taillights and

headlamp bezels as the 1955 Ford.

* A handsome hood scoop was executed to cover a bulge that was created to house the air cleaner.

* “Bullet-shaped” insets at the end of the bumpers carried twin exhaust tips, then the latest in styling and, hence, a must for the new Ford.

On May 18, 1953, Crusoe saw a complete, painted clay model for the first time. It closely corresponded to the shape of the final first Thunderbird.

Meanwhile, Chief Engineer Bill Burnett had cut a Ford two-door sedan to the 102-inch wheelbase of the sports car in order to test some ideas about problems such as handling and brake balance. The decision to build the car came in September 1953.

Although production wouldn’t begin until the fall of 1954, making the new car a 1955 model, Ford was anxious to tell the world about it. Only one small detail remained - a name for the car.

There were 5,000 names considered. Hep Cat, Beaver and Detroit were early, yet undistinguished, front-runners. Also suggested were Runabout, Arcturus, Savile, El Tigre and Coronado.

Crusoe was unimpressed and offered a \$250 suit to anyone who could do better. A young Ford stylist, Alden “Gib” Giberson, submitted the name that would quickly earn approval and eventually acclaim - Thunderbird. He thought of the name because he had once lived in the southwest, where the legend of the Thunderbird was well-known. According to Indian legend, the Thunderbird was a divine helper of man. Its great flapping wings, invisible to the eyes of mortal man, created the winds and the thunder, and gave the Indians water to live on in the dry wilderness where fate had flung them.

Chief Stylist Frank Hersey, also a southwesterner and an enthusiast, spotted the name on Giberson’s list and picked it for the new car. With the name settled and a couple of last-minute appearance changes made, the Ford Thunderbird was ready to go to market;

* Its first public appearance was Feb. 20, 1954, at Detroit’s first post-war auto show.

* The first 1955 Thunderbird came off the line at Ford Motor Company’s Dearborn (Mich.) Assembly Plant on Sept. 9, 1954.

* The press announcement of the new Ford sports car was on Sept. 23, 1954.

* Thunderbird went on sale Oct. 22, 1954 - starting a legend that would grow with each new generation of Thunderbird cars.

The 1955 Thunderbird was more of a personal car concept than a sports car, the result of a decision Crusoe made during the winter of 1953-54. The more luxurious direction created the personal luxury car segment of the automotive market, and Thunderbird would enjoy almost uninterrupted leadership in this segment for decades.

The original Thunderbird was a racy two-seater with clean, crisp lines on a 102-inch wheel base. Overall length was 175 inches, height was a low 52 inches, and the car was 70 inches wide. Standard curb weight was 3,180 pounds.

The base sticker price of \$2,695, included the removable hardtop, but not the soft top. Clock, tachometer, power-operated seats and a 292 CID V-8 engine also were standard equipment. However, practically none of the early Thunderbirds left the dealership without either overdrive or automatic transmission and most of the power options. Prices of the 1955 models ranged from \$3,000 to \$4,000.

The car was an immediate smash hit. Buyers of all ages, from all walks of life described the car in terms such as “wonderful,” a “masterpiece,” “advanced automobile” and a “morale builder that is real fun and sport to drive.”

(adapted from www.blueovalnews.com)

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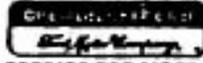
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June 2005

For Sale

- 1983 Mark VI, designer Series. Loaded and mint. 67,000 mi. 2 door with gold moon roof and half vinyl top. Beige, with beige velour interior, wire wheel covers, and premium sound. Car is from Arizona. \$6,500. Bob 734-674-8483.

May 2005

For Sale

- Five 14" wheels off a 1962 T Bird. Good condition. Jerry 248-347-7849
- 4 brake drums, new, 1970 Mustang 2 front brake assemblies with spindles for 1970 Mustang. 1 steering column with new key assembly and horn ring. John, 313-590-1189.
- NOS 6 volt voltage regulator \$25 Used 57-58-59 Ford Town and Country radios. Need restoring. \$95 each. Used spotlights, \$150. NOS 58-59 Ford dome lamp lens \$25 NOS 59 Ford grille. \$150. Many other NOS and used 57, 58, and 59 Ford parts, Howard Voigt 734-944-6930.
- 1935 and 1936 Ford radios. Bill T 734-421-2176.
- 1978 Lincoln Town Coupe, 26,500 miles. \$6,900. Larry Haase 734-502-3293.
- 1963 T-Bird coupe, White with red interior needs TLC \$6,500. Art, 248-553-8879

- 1964 Comet Caliente convertible \$15,000 Don 810-220-0419.
- 1964 T- Bird convertible. Runs, Has newer top, gas tank, and tires. Rebuilt transmission and radiator. Interior and exterior parts have been rechromed and/or anodized. Front and back seats are done. Needs work. Take a look and make me an offer. Wally Wigand 734-522-6477
- 1978 Mercury Monarch Ghia 4-dr, 65k, 302 V8. Excellent condition. Newer tires, brakes, & exhaust. \$1800 obo. Ron, 734.261.9675.

Wanted

- 1966 Mercury Parklane fender skirts. Hank 810-231-3184
- 1969-70 Shelby Mustang running lights. Front fender grille extension molding. Howard Voigt 734-944-6930

Notice

Those members who bought the book "100 Years of Ford" from me that didn't have covers on them, I have extras now. Karl, 248-879-0854.

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Please plan to attend

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