Labor of Love

"Man restores his dad’s beloved car"

The 1953 Chrysler New Yorker Deluxe Newport was never far from my heart. I grew up in the back seat, earned my driver’s license behind its wheel, and posed by it on my high school graduation day. I purchased the car from my father in 1970. It remained with my parents, Archie and Dolores Kunes, in Weedville
Penn., while I served in the USAF for 20 years.

The dream was for father and son to restore it when life quieted down for me. That plan had to be altered after Archie was diagnosed with cancer in 1996. The car was put on a trailer and hauled to my home in Fairfield, CA, where I spent the next decade restoring the cherished vehicle to its original condition.

There was one surprising discovery along the way. The car’s color was called Hollywood Maroon. I was sure it was the original color. Research said otherwise. The original owner, who had it for a brief time, painted the car to match the fleet of cars he used in his funeral business. He didn’t keep the car long because it had two doors and people weren’t happy about having to get in and out of the back seat.

The vehicle had left the factory with a pearl gray body and black top, I had to strip the car down to the metal to find the original color. Even Dad didn’t know the car had been painted. My father passed way in 1998. He never saw the completed restoration. My Mom died about eight months later. There are times when I sit in the back seat and picture my mom and dad in the front seat. The memories of going out in the car on a Saturday or Sunday for hamburgers and ice cream flow freely.

There was one car my dad loved more than the 1953 Chrysler New Yorker. It was a 1946 Chrysler New Yorker. He owned one but sold it to put a down payment on a house for the family. I did most of the restoration myself, however I need to thank "The Clutch Connection and Vaca Valley auto parts for their assistance in rebuilding the transmission and finding parts.

"We had fun doing research on the car." Jack Martin of Vaca Valley Auto Parts said. It was a pleasure to see someone who appreciated the car so much. There were only 3,715 of that model produced. I estimate its one of about a dozen left. I discovered two others on the Internet one in Dover, DE., the other in Chicago, IL.

My original intention was to restore it to a daily driver. A neighbor said I might want to think twice about that since it is a rare car. While driving it around town, I was stopped at a traffic light with my wife, Yoshie, when someone in the car ahead of us, exited the vehicle and walked around the New Yorker to get a better look. We sat through two red lights while the looker returned to her car saying nothing and took off. I purchased a trailer to transport the car to shows narrowing the chance of an accident while driving it on the road.

To my disbelief and amazement, I have been taking the car to shows and have won awards. My dad would be so proud. I’ve attended the Hillsborough Concours d’Elegance, Niello in Sacramento, Ironstone, Greystone Mansion in Beverly Hills, Carmel on the Avenue. The car has been featured in the Drive magazine and on "My Classic Car" TV show with Dennis Gage. My biggest dream and wish would be to show the car at the Pebble Beach Concours d’Elegance. Jack Martin at Vaca Valley Auto Parts, hopes to accompany me when that dream comes to life.

You can learn more about the car at www.1953chryslernewyorker.com.