

Are you SIRious? Bruce Roberts, Editor

OUR BIG SIR HAS BEEN VERY ACTIVE IN THE RESTORATION OF COLLECTOR CARS FOR DECADES WITH A DECIDEDLY EMPHASIS IN CARS BUILT BY THE CHRYSLER CORP. PERHAPS BECAUSE HIS FIRST 3 CARS AS A TEEN WERE PRE-WAR DODGES, OR BECAUSE HE SPENT 4 YEARS WORKING FOR THE CHRYSLER/PLYMOUTH DIVISION AS A DISTRICT MANAGER (THE LIAISON BETWEEN THE FACTORY AND 22 DEALERSHIPS IN NORTHERN CA) HE BUILT A 6 CAR GARAGE AND SHOP BEHIND HIS NEWARK HOME TO CONTAIN THE COLLECTION.

After selling my Millbrae Shell station in 1964, I bought a 1960 Chrysler 300F hardtop coupe in preparation for an August marriage and became an apostle of the "Lettered" Chrysler 300s made from 1955 through 1965. In the eleven years these cars were built, about 16,000 total, these expensive and powerful coupes and convertibles were the 'halo' cars for the factory, intended to draw buyers to the sales floor and then sell more sensible vehicles; not unlike Thunderbirds and Corvettes for the other guys. These grandfathers of today's Chrysler 300s started out in 1955 with 300 Hemi-engined horses and peaked with some optional 400+ horse models just a few years later. After the initial car in 1955, each newer year model was named 300 B,C,D,E,F,G,H,J,K,L. They became known as The Banker's Hot-rod or The Beautiful Brute. I was unable to use my four year old 300F for my honeymoon as returning from Army Reserve training in Utah in July's heat near Bonneville, the mean speed indicated was in excess of 100 with some runs to 130. The 413 dual 4 barrel engine (carbs not north to south, but east to west on 30 inch 'ram' intake manifolds) got so hot it froze solid between Winnemucca and Lovelock. Sadder but wiser soldiers took the Greyhound to the Bay Area and the car was flat-towed over the old Donner Pass behind a Pontiac Ventura

to Millbrae. The Chrysler had to weigh 400 pounds greater than the tow car. He certainly earned the \$150 he charged me! My fiancée wasn't too unhappy because she always thought the car was much too 'showoffy' to her taste. 24 years later when I bought an identical 300F, she loved it. See how maturity (like good red wine) can be acquired with age? Five years later from wedding day, I am the leasing/fleet manager for Millbrae Chrysler-Plymouth-Imperial where Millbrae BART is now. I come to work to find a 1961 300G coupe parked where trade-ins sit until they are wholesaled. I asked the sales manager what they had allowed at ACV (actual cash value...not what the new car buyer thought they got) and it was \$300. So I gave him \$350 for it. Certainly didn't need it, as I had a New Yorker as my 'demo' but it was great fun to have another LETTER for a few months. They are currently worth up to \$50k.

Next was the original 1955 300 coupe that started it all. I was having some work done on the 1957 DeSoto Adventurer in Redwood City and the proprietor tells me a young man working a few doors down told him he had a 1955 Chrysler 300 that he was in financially over his head when he really wanted to restore a Camaro. It was original to a fault and had seldom left Contra Costa county. I paid him his asking price of \$3,250 and as I closed the door to his workplace, I heard the young men whooping and hollering about the old guy that just paid full price for that old car. With a \$5k paint, \$500 used interior and some wire wheels, our family enjoyed the car for 6 years before Chrysler Corp had 'sellers remorse' and bought

it back for \$25k to loan to journalists to drive when they were reviewing the new crop of front wheel drive 300 sedans in 1998, as an historical reference. A year later I chatted with David E Davis, previous editor of Car and Driver and founder of Automobile Magazine in a Williamsburg Chrysler 300 Club convention and he tells me that he drove my car for a week. How do you know it was mine? Because it says on the glove box door..."Larry, please don't drive this car over 139.346 mph. Tim Flock 1996". I'd taken the glove door to a previous club meet in Charlottesville including the race track visit and he had autographed it with the time-slip info from his Daytona record setting run in a similar car. Tim won 39 NASCAR races in his career.

The final LETTER of the Chrysler's series was the 1965 300L, which had evolved to not much more than a sales competitor to the New Yorker and had much the same drive train. An optician friend had inherited it and it was too thirsty for him so he asked me to sell it for him. After a week of driving it, I sold my 560SEL company car and used the 300 for 2 years. There also was a 300D (1958) for awhile while searching for the second 300F (1960) both of which were considerably more interesting than the 300L.

Now the star of the 300 Show, a 1957 300C convertible bought from an automobile pawn-shop in SF. The paint was down to the primer, the leather and top were tattered and it would not start. When the flatbed was unloading my wife

exclaimed "You paid \$15,000 for that car in terrible shape?" I had to explain that even if the paint and seats were pretty nice, they all would have to be replaced anyhow and the more dramatic the change, the easier it is to write the checks. It won multiple awards including the Franklin-Templeton award at the Hillsboro Concours for most elegant post-war open car and made the cover of the expensive Collectible Automobile Magazine. She changed her tune when we received a check for \$100,000 when it sold some years ago. Other complete restorations include a 1933 Chrysler, 1966 427 Hemi Charger, 1951 Cadillac convertible, 1962 Imperial convertible, 1948 Chrysler street rod, 1966 300 convertible, 1961 ram-inducted Dodge, and a dozen others that were just fun to own but not rebuild or refresh.