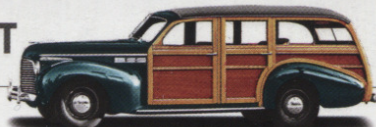


BUICK's PREWAR HIGH POINT

DAZZLING DISTINCTIVE DESIGNS



Hemmings

# CLASSIC CAR

THE DEFINITIVE ALL-AMERICAN COLLECTOR-CAR MAGAZINE

JUNE 2015 #129



PONTIAC's 326 H.O.  
THE 1965 LE MANS



NAPCO CONVERSIONS  
GMC 4x4 PICKUP TRUCKS

## V-12 SUPREMACY

PACKARD's SMOOTH-SPINNING TWELVE



### RESTORATION PROFILE

1959 PLYMOUTH BELVEDERE  
PART II—PAINTING, FINAL  
ASSEMBLY AND DRIVING



### PLUS:

- 1929 PIERCE-ARROW
- 1975 FORD ELITE
- BRAKING SENSATION



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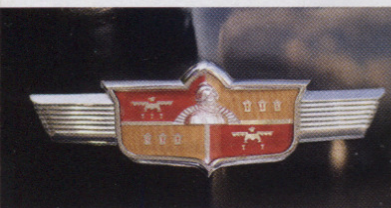
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## Belvedere Beauty

*In just two years, a fairly rare 1959 Plymouth Belvedere convertible goes from parts car to show winner. Part II—Painting, final assembly and the enjoyment of driving the finished product*

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD LENTINELLO • RESTORATION PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD KOCH

Since we started publishing this magazine nearly 11 years ago, we have profiled lots of fascinating restoration projects. Some were body-on restorations, others were body-off and ground-up restorations, while several were simply refurbishments that required just a repaint, new upholstery, carpet and





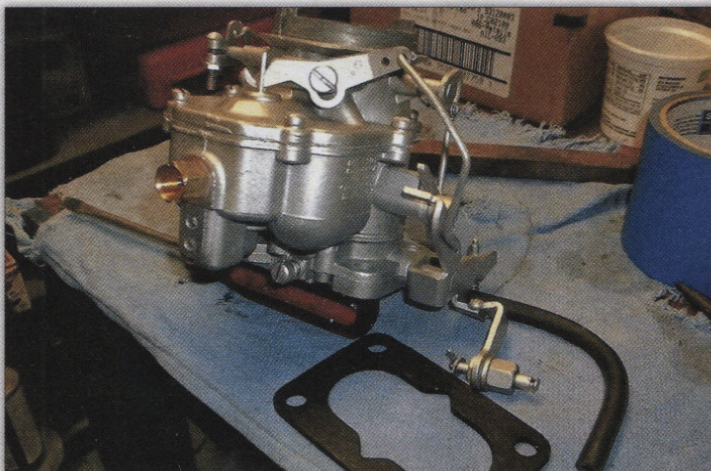
After the body was bolted back on the frame to have the replacement floor pans precisely aligned, it was lifted off again in order to be sprayed with a single coat of Eastwood's Encapsulator Epoxy, followed by two coats of urethane primer/sealer.



The replacement 318-cu.in. V-8 engine was sent to Lake Park Auto Machine Shop in nearby Lake Park to be machined and rebuilt. The block was bored .030-over and fitted with new pistons; the crankshaft was cut .010, polished and balanced for smooth operation.



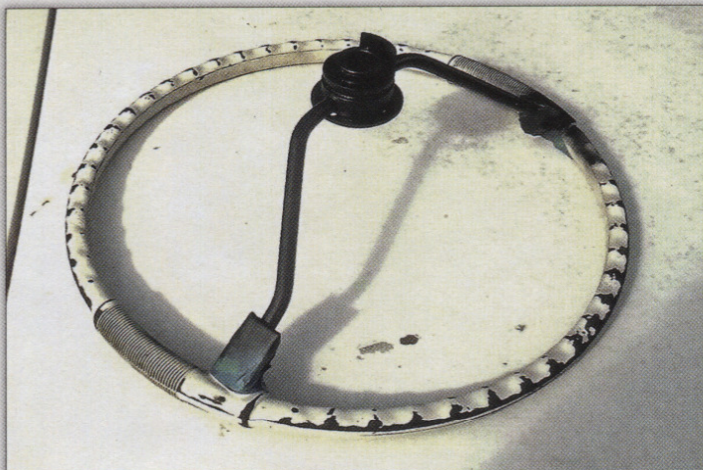
A new oil pump and distributor driveshaft, which is gear-driven by the camshaft, was installed because the original gear had several broken teeth. An NOS shaft and gear assembly was found at Len Dawson's Deception Pass Auto Parts in Washington state.



The replacement engine had a two-barrel intake, so Richard decided to keep it and buy a used two-barrel carb instead of switching to a four-barrel set-up. He now regrets that, due to the two-barrel's poor gas mileage. It was rebuilt prior to installation.



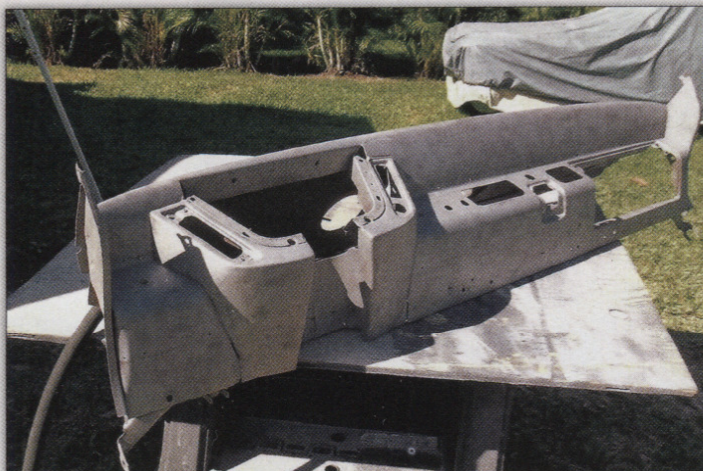




The original "steering wheel" was just a rusted metal ring, so after Dan Morton, webmaster of [www.59plymouth.net](http://www.59plymouth.net), gave him a replacement steering wheel, Richard lightly sanded the rim, then applied three coats of Rust-Oleum Gloss Black Appliance Epoxy.



Right-side rear armrest was fabricated using the left-side armrest as a mirror image pattern because the original armrest was rusted beyond recognition. Both armrests were sent to SMS Auto Fabrics in Oregon to be covered so they would match the door panels.



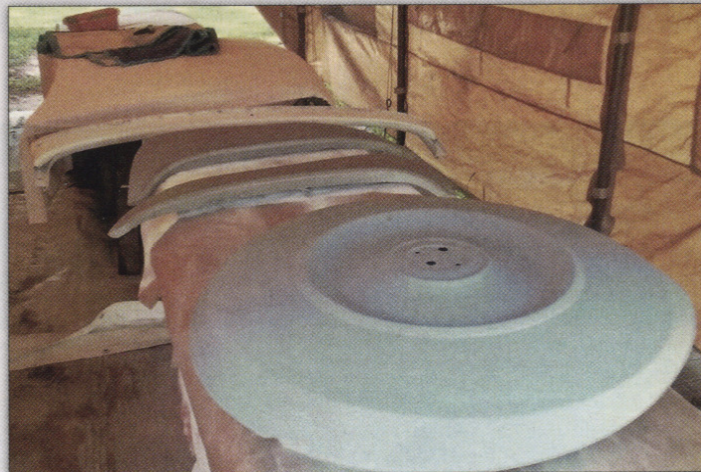
After the instrument panel had been removed and all the knobs, switches and wiring had been taken off, it was sandblasted down to bare metal using 30-grade media abrasive. After a second blast using finer 60-grade media, it was primed and painted.



Instead of spraying the body in one shot, it was easier for Richard to spray the car in sections. Using easy-to-remove blue tape, the entire firewall, floor pan and both sides of the windshield were covered with thick autobody paper for maximum protection.

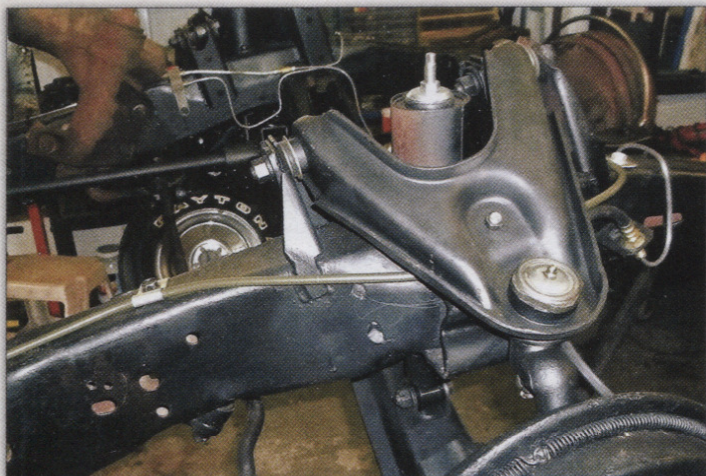


Both front fenders, doors and hoods were refinished separately. Just a few small spots required a thin layer of lightweight body filler, followed by a coat of light gray epoxy primer, then two coats of primer/sealer. All the painting was done by Richard.

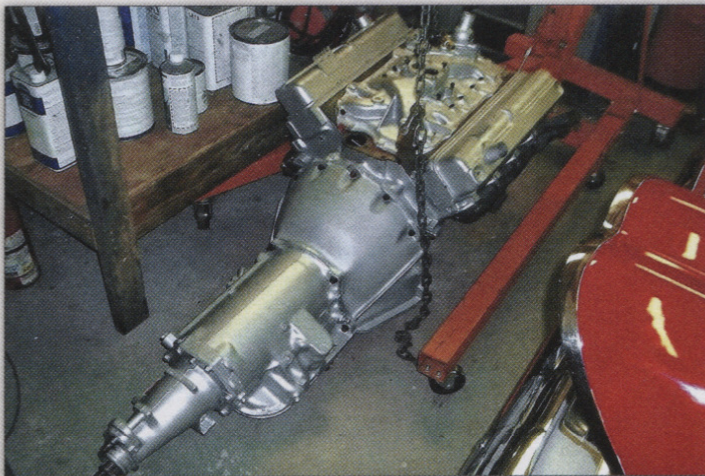


All the removable body panels, as well as all the small body and trim pieces such as the convertible top header bow and the sport deck cover, were primed and painted inside Richard's canvas-covered "garage," which he bought at Costco. It's an ideal setup.





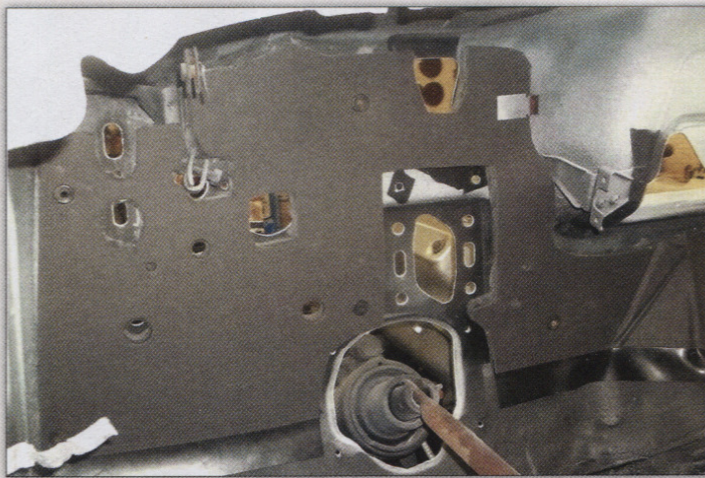
Every wearing component, such as ball joints, tie-rods, bushings, bearings, seals and shocks was replaced with a new part. The old rusted gas and brake lines, and brake flex hoses, were also replaced, including the little brackets that hold them onto the frame.



With the rebuilt and painted V-8 now back from the machine shop, the intake, valve covers, exhaust manifolds and engine mounts were installed before the engine was bolted to the transmission. Then the unit was lifted into place using a two-ton engine hoist.



To help prevent unwanted road noise from infiltrating the cabin, a layer of Eastwood's Thermo-Cooustic Sound Deadener barrier was installed all over the floor and on the entire firewall. Made of a butyl rubber membrane, it sells for about \$120-\$150.



A new factory-correct interior firewall insulation pad was sourced from Gary Goers. Specializing in Chrysler parts, Gary also rebuilt the rubber-covered vent doors and supplied all weatherstripping, rubber bumpers and the gold "V-8" trunk emblem.

some mechanical work to make them roadworthy and respectable looking once more. But the most fascinating aspect of this particular 1959 Plymouth Belvedere's restoration isn't so much how it was carried out and its end result, but that it was a laborious body-off restoration performed mainly by just one man. A man who was already well into his seventies when the project first got under way.

New Orleans transplant Richard Koch of Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, purchased this Belvedere convertible in January 2011 when he was already 74 years of age. He then started its body-off restoration in June 2012 when he was 75, and completed it just 24 months later in October 2014 when he had just turned 78. Now that's



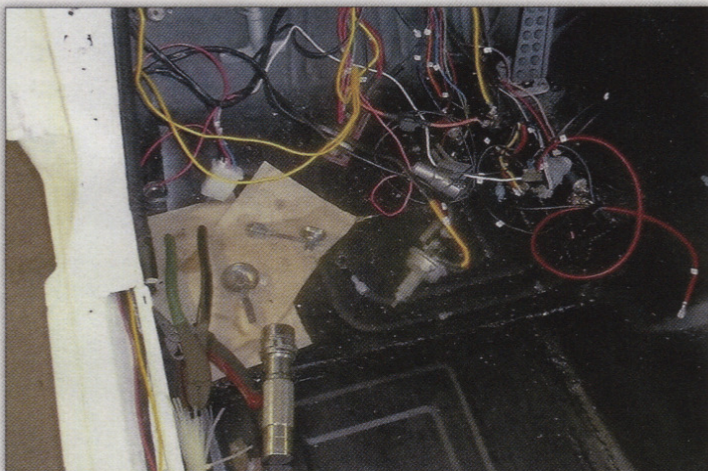




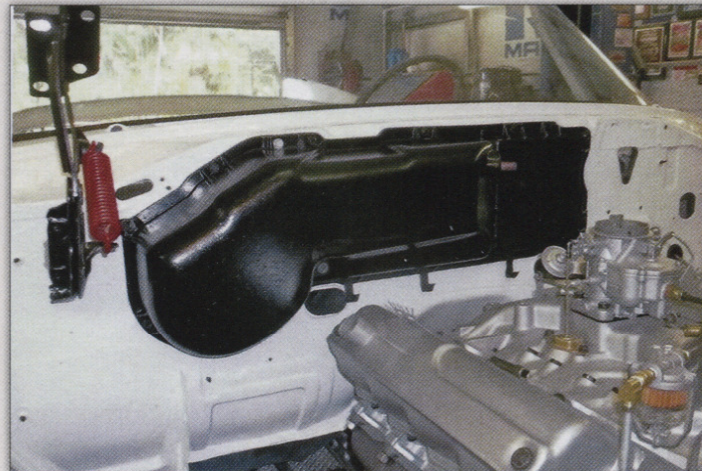
Each door's window operating system was refurbished and then reinstalled with new glass run channels and inner and outer door whiskers. The interior of the doors was sandblasted, wiped with Ospho, sprayed with two coats of epoxy primer and seamsealed.



There's nothing like the comfort of using the kitchen table to reassemble the instrument panel. After a single coat of epoxy primer, the backside was painted white, as per the original, then the topside was refinished with several coats of gloss black.



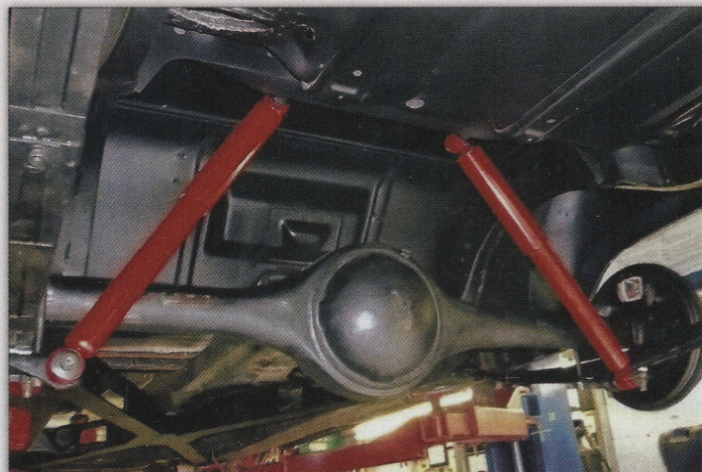
A new factory-correct reproduction wiring harness was purchased from YnZ's Yesterdays Parts. The new harness included a numbered schematic drawing, and all wires were tagged with matching numbers. According to Richard, "It was very easy to install."



Using nothing more than a rattle can, the heater housing was cleaned, primed and painted with Rust-Oleum Gloss Black Appliance Epoxy. The heater core was flushed and tested before installation, and all new rubber gaskets and drain flappers were installed.



After the body was painted and the engine and transmission installed, the radiator was bolted to the chassis along with both inner fenders. This allowed the radiator to be installed and hoses to be connected to the engine, along with the horns and hood hinges.

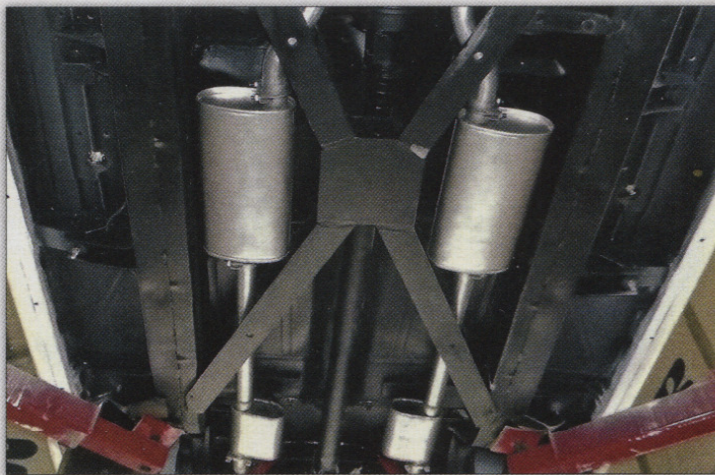


The replacement axle and differential assembly came from Richard's parts car. It was rebuilt using new bearings and seals, and the original 3:31-ratio gear set was retained. It was finished in the correct semi-gloss black, while new rear shocks were sprayed red.

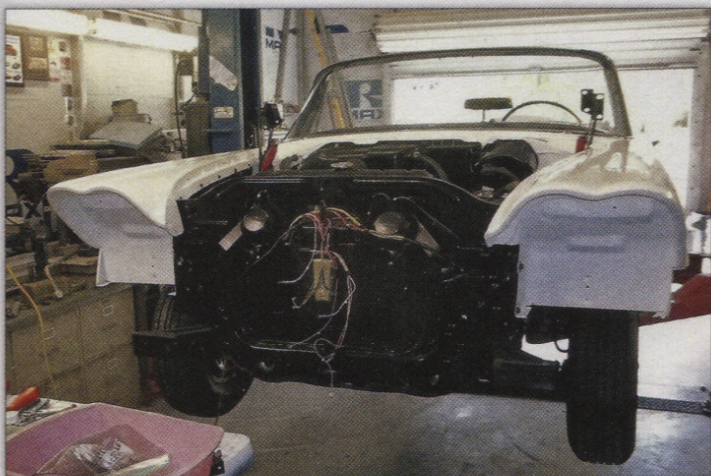




Gas tank is original, but prior to being repainted, it was cleaned in a hot tank and the interior filled with a special sealer followed by several coats of silver enamel on the outside. The straps were media blasted and then refinished in semi-gloss enamel.



From the exhaust manifolds back to the dual exhaust tips, the exhaust system had been replaced with new pipes, resonators, mufflers and clamps. Made of mild steel, they were refinished in high-temperature silver heat paint to protect them from rusting.



This is the period during a restoration when progress slows down, because you need to take extra care in bolting the restored components back in place without damaging them or chipping the new paint. With the fenders on, next came the headlamps and grille.



Chrome plating was done by Space Coast Plating & Metal Refinishing in Melbourne, Florida, while the installation of the new canvas top, seat upholstery and carpeting was performed by Sergio Morales of S&S Auto Tops and Custom Upholstery, West Palm Beach.

truly amazing, and just goes to prove that determination goes a long way.

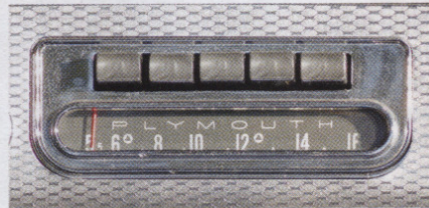
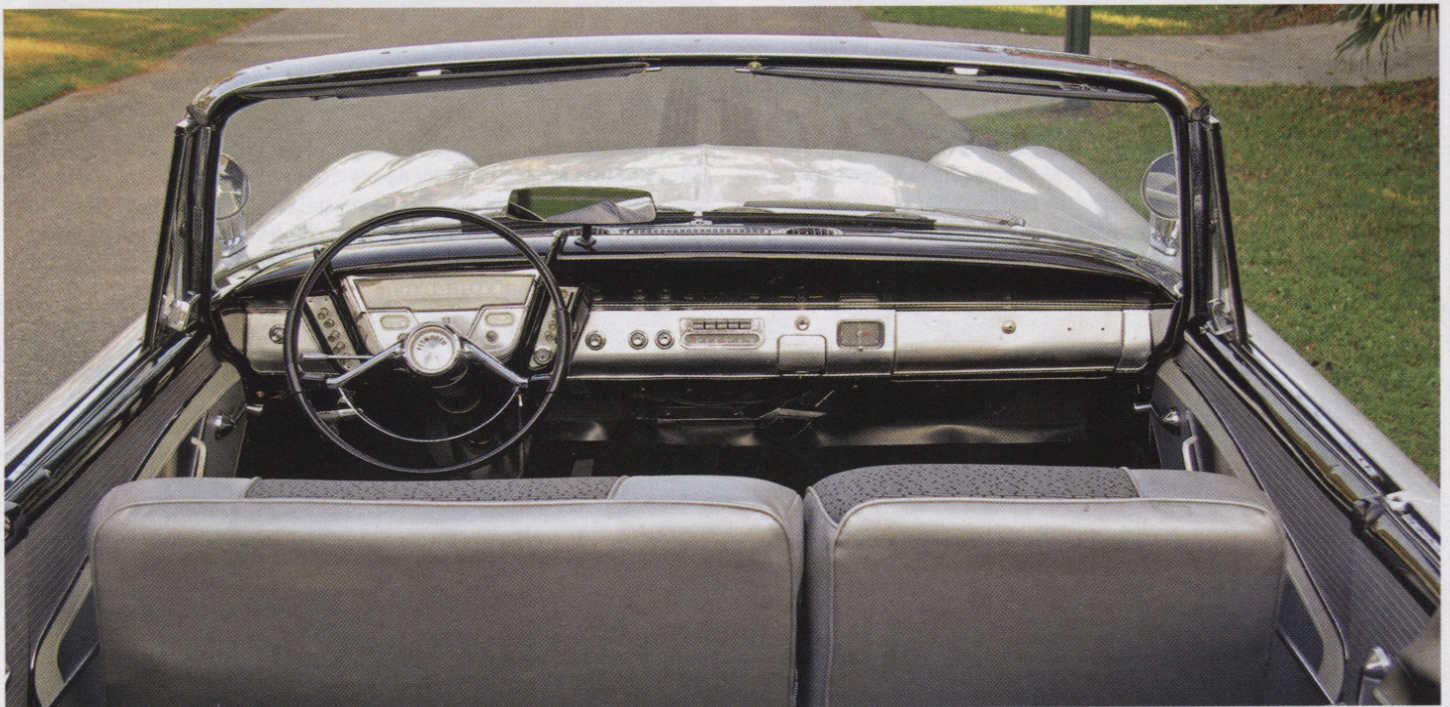
"I retired when I was 69 years old, with the intention of restoring and working on my old cars; it's something I wanted to do for a long, long time," Richard enthuses. "I looked forward to working on my cars every day, enjoyed the fun (not work) and kept at it until I was finished. Oh, by the way, it's a lot more fun if you have a lift, especially at my age."

Richard goes on to say, "If you make the restoration project fun, and something you want to do every day, then it's not work. Just picture yourself cruising down the road when you are finished. It also helps to have a parts car on hand."

Being the type of person who prefers

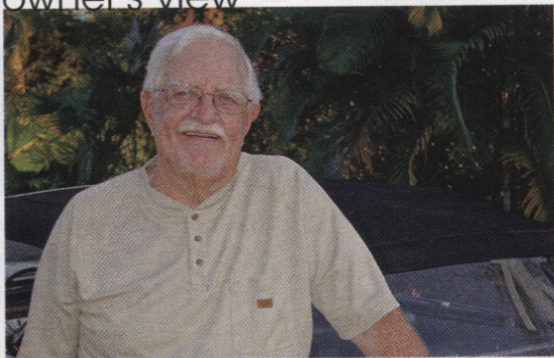




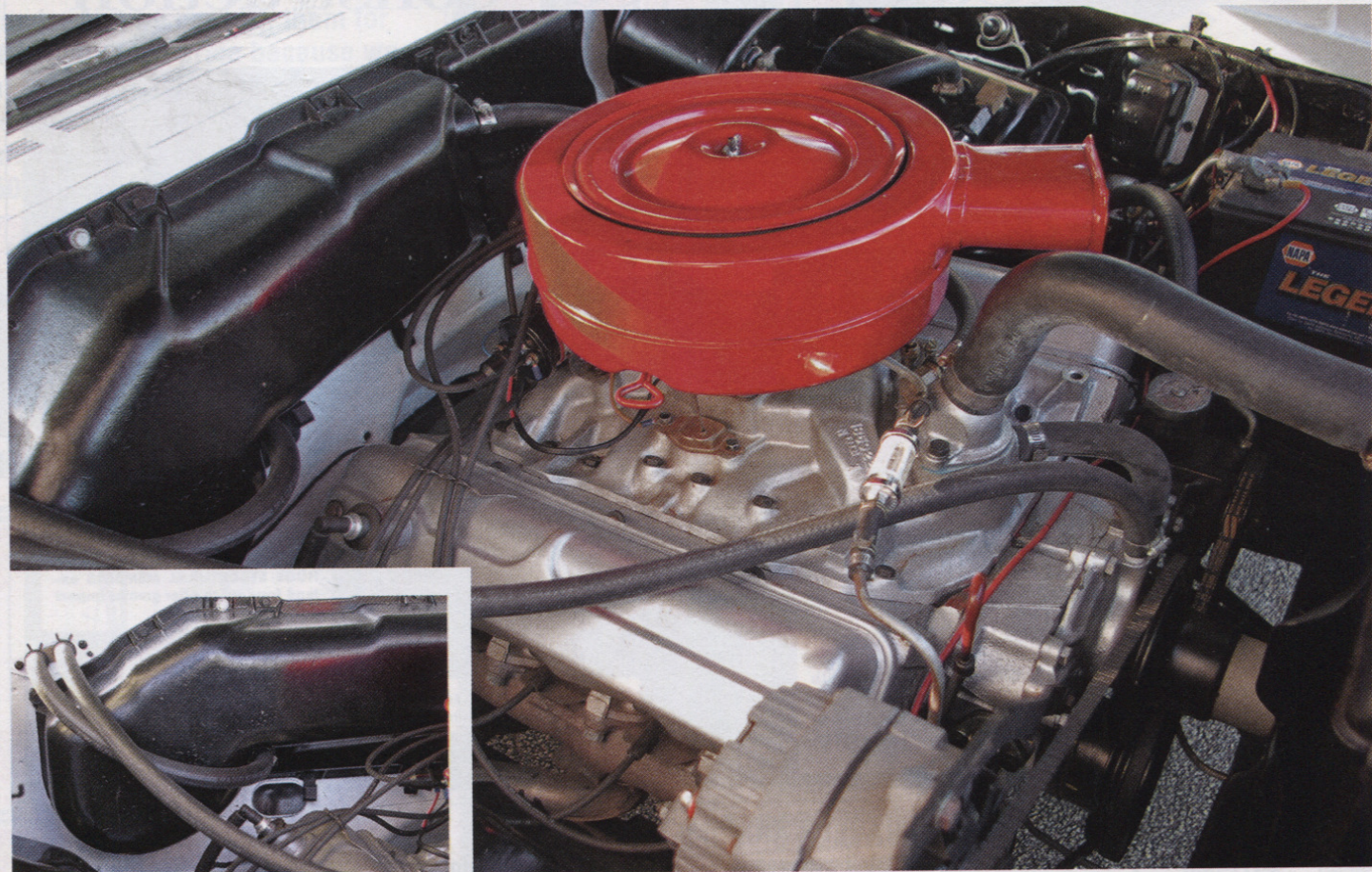




## owner's view



I simply love all of Chrysler's late-Fifties Forward Look models, which were designed by Virgil Exner, with the 1959 models having the best looking fins of all the Plymouths of that era. Now that I finished restoring this Belvedere, this in effect is a brand new car. I painted the body myself in our home garage; I applied three coats of Pure White single-stage urethane enamel, which I then wet sanded and buffed. It was a lot of hard, backbreaking work, especially at my age, although the stripping of the old finish was the hardest part. I'm a member of the Plymouth Owners Club, National De Soto Club and a local club called the Asphalt Angels, so now the only thing I'm going to do is drive it and enjoy it.



to do as much of the restoration work as he can, Richard also enjoys carrying out the painstaking refinishing process by himself. "Everything but the body was painted in what I call a Costco Garage, which is a portable garage completely enclosed with polyester canvas," Richard tells us. "I hang about 12 sheets of Bounce dryer sheets throughout the garage, which helps keep all the wasps and bugs out of the space. But the Costco Garage was a bit too small to accommodate the nearly 18-foot-long Belvedere, so the actual body was painted inside my main garage. With the car placed on my lift—which helped raise it off the floor so I didn't have to break my back bending down during the spraying—everything in the garage was first covered with painters' plastic drop cloths

to prevent the overspray from ruining my tools and everything else in the garage. Drop-cloth-covered walls also helped keep the dust on the shelves from kicking up and ruining the newly applied paint."

The only components on the Belvedere that are not correct are the alternator and the Chrysler electronic ignition, which Richard wanted to install in order to make the engine run better, be more reliable and start quicker, which it now does. And since these photographs were taken, Richard bought a set of wide whitewall radials, which, he recently told us, totally transformed the car's ride and handling to the point where the old Plymouth is now much more enjoyable and reassuring to drive.

Richard rebuilt his Belvedere so well that shortly after its restoration was com-

pleted, he and his wife, Yvonne, drove to a family reunion in Mississippi, then on to New Orleans to visit other family and friends, and also stopped along the way to take part in the Cruisin' the Coast show in Biloxi, Mississippi. Throughout the entire journey, the car drove perfectly. "We drove 2,060 miles that trip, and the car performed flawlessly," Richard is proud to tell us. "And best of all, we had a whole lot of fun driving in it."

Looking ahead to the future, Richard explains: "Now, after doing two complete body-off restorations and a repaint on my 1959 De Soto, all of which I did after I turned 70 years of age, the only thing I'm going to do now is oil changes, bearings, bushings and ball joints—that's it. I just want to drive them." 🐞