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## The 50th Anniversary of the 1962 Plymouth

MIKE PERLBERG PHOTO



**Merrill and Bobbi Berkheimer's 1962 Fury convertible**



# Kitchen Debate

Longtime readers of the BULLETIN have heard me say time and again that mail time is always fun time. I never know what is going to show up. Even now that "snail-mail" has been largely replaced by email, the same holds true. When I opened an email July 22nd from my friend Andrey Khrisanfov from Moscow, Russia, and saw the words "I can't wait to share this with you," I knew it was going to be something very special.

Andrey is a writer-photographer with *Auto Review National Automotive* newspaper in Moscow, a Russian language automotive newspaper/magazine. He and I have exchanged information and photos over the years, although most of the time I can't read the articles (have you ever seen a feature on '39 Plymouths written in Russian?). Early this summer, Hagerty Insurance's on-line magazine had an article about "the only car museum in Moscow" which I forwarded to Andrey. Needless to say, he was not impressed with the author, as there are several car museums in Moscow, and none have a car such as one particular brand the writer alluded to. Knowing my interest in Russian-built automobiles such as the ZIL, ZIM and ZIS, Andrey has kept filling my in-box with photos of these cars, taken in various Moscow museums or car meets. Also included have been photos of various Plymouths, Plymouth-derived export DeSotos and a series of Russian-built cars that look suspiciously like pre-war American DeSotos.

But there was one particular vehicle that Andrey was so excited about: "It's an actual Belvedere that was once an



*Soviet citizens look over the 1959 Plymouth, one of 22 American cars on display at the most popular exhibit at the American National Exhibition in Moscow.*

exhibit at (the) American National Exhibition in Moscow of 1959."

Being 13 years old in 1959, I vaguely remembered hearing something about an American exhibition in Moscow. I have since relied on an article written by Alexandra A. Jopp for more information. She referred to the exhibition as "the most ambitious project implemented after the signing of an East-West cultural exchange agreement in 1958." It was most famous, however, for the impromptu "Kitchen Debate" between U.S. Vice-president Richard Nixon and Soviet First Secretary of State Nikita Khrushchev, in which the two men argued the advantages of their respective economic and political systems. The "debate" had been captured for the first time on a new American invention, videotape.

Held in Sokolniki Park (i.e. Falconers Park), the American National Exhibition ran for 42 days in July and August of 1959. Opening on July 25th, the exhibition was viewed by

2.7 million "selected" Soviet citizens. Admission was free, but the show was not open to the general public, as ticket distribution was controlled by the government. (A Soviet Cultural Exhibit opened in New York City at the same time which included performances by the Bolshoi Ballet but that was viewed by only 1.1 million Americans.) The American exhibit covered over 400,000 square feet of Sokolniki Park. At the center of the exhibition was an 80-foot

high geodesic dome which housed eight (of eleven) exhibits, including space exploration, nuclear research, medical research, American labor, chemical research, basic research and education, all designed to demonstrate the success of the American educational system. One of the more popular exhibits at the dome was at its entrance where visitors were greeted by RAMAC 305, IBM's mechanized diplomat, a state-of-the-art computer programmed to answer more than 3,000 questions about American life, values and ideas.

People waited for up to two hours to get a chance to ask RAMAC questions!

According to Joppa, RAMAC was not the most popular exhibit. The Soviet people were most interested in an exhibit of American automobiles – 22 cars, representing the latest 1959 models from Detroit's leading automakers. Other popular displays included color television, a recreation of an American house – half a house, actually – open on one side like a giant doll house to show off the interior and appliances, and a contemporary American art exhibit. It was during a tour of the house that Nixon and Khrushchev exchanged words as Pepsi was introduced to the Russian people by none other than Khrushchev himself! Slyly (remember, he was "Tricky Dicky!"), Nixon invited Khrushchev to try a Pepsi dispensed from a kiosk where 10,000 glasses of Pepsi per hour were dispensed. The photograph of the Soviet

premier holding a cup emblazoned with the Pepsi logo was seen on the cover of many Soviet magazines – and led to Pepsi being allowed to do business in the country!

At the automobile exhibition, people lined up in droves to view the 22 vehicles on display. Seemingly unimpressed, Khrushchev informed those present “we will be making automobiles for America.” Among the exhibitors was Chrysler Corporation, which distributed color

sales brochures, printed in both English and Russian, showing the entire lineup of Chrysler’s 1959 models. While we don’t have a list of the cars that were displayed, we do know one of them was an off-white ’59 Belvedere sport sedan, the car to which Andrey drew my attention. He wrote:

“It was acquired, right from the exhibition stand, by (the) American Embassy in Moscow and painted black over its initial off-white. Upon finishing its ambassadorial tenure (it was) sold to Moscow Film



**Chrysler’s Russian/American 1959 brochure:** This example is too fragile to bend open to scan the interior pages. There is one page each for Plymouth, Dodge, DeSoto, Chrysler, Imperial and Dodge pickups and trucks, plus a features page and a specifications page. Have you seen the Dodge swept-wing or DeSoto swept-wing with a Hernando bust?

(Mosfilm) where it remained ever since as a “movie car.” Nearly killed there, it is now in good hands, and restoration plans are being contemplated. The scene (where the photos were taken) is Sokolniki Park where the aforementioned exhibition had been conducted in (the) summer (of) 1959.

A remnant of the Cold War, the car has definitely seen better days, but plans are underway to restore it to its



American Exhibition glory! Another Moscow American embassy car also survives, a ‘57 “PlySoto.” Which makes one ask the question: Why weren’t the embassy cars more prestigious, like a Cadillac or Imperial? More puzzling is what happened to the other 21 cars that were displayed at the American National Exhibition of 1959.

-- Jim Benjaminson