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Summer in a Suped-Up Studebaker



Car: 1950 Studebaker Champion Regal Deluxe (Bullet Nose Convertible)

Owners: John and Jan Robison

Total time spent refurbishing: 8 years

Interior: Lovingly called "Wayne Newton's Nightmare," consisting of crushed red velvet seats with silver and red metal flake naugahyde.

Unique upgrades: Remote control doors, and an air suspension system, which can drop the nose or raise up the back to go over speed bumps.

Hidden treasures: A can of Treet, which is imitation Spam, was found in the trunk when they brought the car home.

by Blythe Thimsen

It's true, good things do come to those who wait, and John and Jan Robison are living, breathing testimonies to that. For 15 years John had been searching for a 1950 bullet-nose convertible Studebaker. In 1994, he found it.



"I found it in a farmer's lot, at an estate sale. The guy had 200 cars sitting out there, and they all were junk," says Robison. Diligently scouring the field, examining car after car, he came upon a disintegrating tarp that obviously had been covering whatever was underneath for many years. "I saw something covered under this tarp. I know these cars and know the shape enough to have known it was the mysterious bullet-nosed convertible I'd been looking for, for 15 years!"

Robison says that at the time the car was first released, the bullet nose was "radical and controversial." He says when displayed in a dealership, the car's nose was often hidden with the help of a potted plant or something to distract customers from seeing it.

As much attention as the car gets now, it was not always the case for the Studebaker. "No one had any respect for them, not even Studebaker clubs; in the old days, you were a loser if you drove a Studebaker," says Robison. "They were looked down on by everyone. They were like tin cans, like the equivalent of a Yugo, today."



Robison knew the potential though, and bought the car from the estate. He would again have to wait though, this time when it came to refurbishing it. The car's original title was lost and it took four years of persistent work to get a new title before he could begin work on the car. "What happens if you put \$50,000 into the car and someone shows up and says they have the original title?" says Robison. "Well, then you've put \$50,000 into *their* car."

Once a title was secure, he spent three years disassembling and rebuilding. It was a group effort, in which he worked with local businesses specializing in car restoration, as well as providing hands-on experience for some of the students from SCC's automotive department.

The last time the Studebaker



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was licensed was 1966, and the Robisons bought it in 1994, meaning for 28 years it had been sitting in that muddied field. "When they took the body off of the frame, it broke in half," says Robison, giving an indication of the type of work that had to go into restoring it.

The car was finally completed in August 2005, just in time for the 2005 Studebaker International Meet, held in Spokane, Washington. The Robison's car took third place in the custom category. "We thought there was no way we'd win, so we didn't even show up to the awards part because we had company," says Jan.

For a guy who didn't learn to drive until he was 23, cars have become Robison's passion. He has also restored a '65 Valiant convertible, '59 Rambler Ambassador, '51 Studebaker Starlight Coupe, and a '64 Plymouth Barracuda.

"It's not a trailer queen, it's a driver," says Robison of this Studebaker. That means this car actually gets out on the road. And when it does, looks, comments and whistles come from nearly everyone who passes by. "It give me the jollies to see people's reaction when I drive by," says Robison. "People can be depressed, and then they see this and smile." ■

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