

Ed and Arlene's 1955 Thunderbird

by Ed Raabe

Our Thunderbird story begins with a search for Edsel "Dog Dish" hubcaps in Hershey PA, 2011. I was looking for original hubcaps for our 1959 Edsel and thought that a trip to the AACA Hershey October meet would be just the place to find what I needed. I have waited a long time to go there and since our daughter, Ashley and son-in-law, Thomas, were living in Baltimore we thought a nice family weekend up to the show would be fun. I dragged Thomas around the Swap Meet lots for 8 hours in the blazing sun (it didn't rain that year) looking for those stupid hubcaps. Finally we met a great Edsel guy named Henry Klinger, but some Scandinavians had just wiped him out of all his hubcaps, among other rare Edsel parts! He was a great connection and since then we have had many satisfactory parts transactions.



The Car Corral at Hershey is famous for its' vast selection of divergent Classic cars for sale. The next day with my wife Arlene and Ashley along we strolled up and down the Corral, which as you know can take hours.



Suddenly we came upon 3 Thunderbirds. Now Arlene, my wife, and I have discussed owning a Thunderbird for a while. It is for us, "the ultimate classic car". Of course it had to be "that turquoise-teal color" which we all know is really blue, THUNDERBIRD BLUE! Well, one of the three cars is a 55 (my favorite Early Bird) and it IS Thunderbird Blue. We look it over, think it's really nice and say to ourselves "one day, that's the kind of T-Bird we'll get", then keep on walking

That night we talk some more about THAT Thunderbird. It has what we want and it's represented by Marvin Hill, of Hills Automotive one of the most respected Thunderbird restorers in

the USA, so no worries about the build quality. And then there is that C.D. we have that's not doing anything for us in the bank!

Thomas and I get up early the next day and go back right to the Corral and it's NOT THERE. The other 2 cars are, but not "our Bird"! So I call the girls and tell them "too bad I guess it got sold" and to relax and come over in a little while, Thomas and I are going to look around at the Vendors for some Die Cast cars.



Two hours later they show up and we walk the Corral to see if anything new has showed up. As we approach the Hills cars, there it is, "Our T-Bird"! So we go over and start asking questions. When was it restored? How many miles on the engine rebuild? etc. etc. I go for a test ride with Marvin Hill's son and I am impressed. Starts right up, shifts strong, moves out like a 'Bat out of Hell' It's "all good".

When we get back I tell Arlene if we are going to do it, this really is "the one", so we meet Marvin and work out a deal, BUT we are in PA and we live in FLA! (Transportation is costly and if I can get it thrown in, I'll close). Marvin brings over his partner Jim and tells us he has a home in Daytona would we be interested in picking it up there. YES we have a deal!

Now we are all family and Jim says “Hell, I’ll bring it right to your home in Ft Lauderdale”! About a week later Jim arrives in his “football field long” enclosed car carrier with our new Thunderbird inside.

We are the 3rd owners, the first being Betty and Gary Sheppard of Parkersburg, West Virginia and the second Mr. James Bishoff of Belpre Ohio, for whom Hills Automotive restored the car. Being a low mileage car the restoration was performed without the need to remove the body from the frame. Born on July 26th 1955, at the Dearborn MI. factory as a P-Code 292cu.in V8 with automatic “air cooled” transmission, power steering and power brakes, we are still in the process of researching an original bill of sale, but have had no luck so far, since most of those records for the 55 T-Birds are lost.



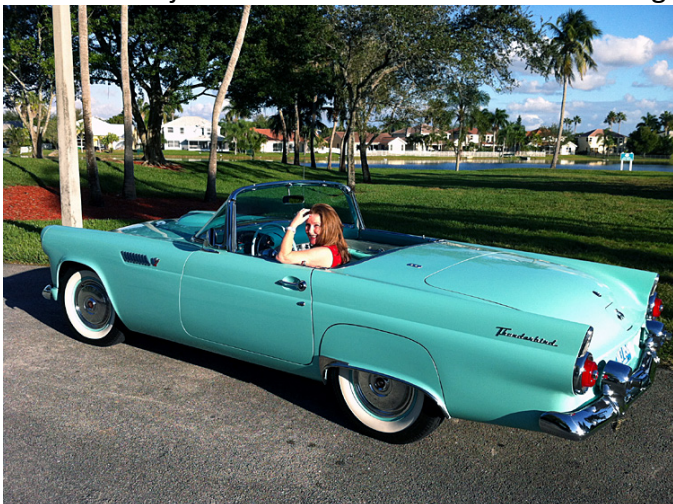
We joined the CTCI and Classic Thunderbird Club of South Florida right away. We were welcomed enthusiastically to our local club by the founder, Felipe Cos, whose Thunderbird experience went back to pre-Castro Cuba where he had the reputation for the “Fastest Thunderbird on the Island”. He was always ready to help a club member with any Thunderbird issue that came up and was still restoring cars at his home at 78 years

old! He even published a book answering the most common Thunderbird repair issues called Thunderpedia. Sadly Felipe passed recently, but his Legend will live on.

We are also became members of The AACA South Florida region and have had the honor of our car to be chosen for the Havana Nights Memory Lane Exhibit in 2012. We attend many AACA sponsored Events and have made some great friends in the Club. One of our favorite Events is Art Deco Weekend in the South Beach district of Miami. Classic cars are lined up along the beach among the Deco Hotels, Restaurants and Artists booths making for a spectacular showing of Classic Cars.



I have a lot of fun maintaining our Thunderbird in top running condition. We forget how much routine maintenance the older cars required, which includes a minimum of a weekly drive for at least 30 minutes to keep the “juices” flowing. It’s a tough job, but somebody needs to do it! Since owning it I have made over 50 small improvements to make it ready for an AACA regional judging, including replacing the tires with original bias-ply wide white walls, like the kind it left the factory wearing, new carpeting and dozens of adjustments and tweaks. We are looking forward to our first Junior Award.



Among other awards, our Thunderbird has won a Blue Ribbon for Best in Class at the Boca Raton Concours de Elegance, 2012, The AACA South Florida Region Miracle Mile Best of Class, 2013 and The Dave Siegel Memorial Award for Best of Show, 2014. Dave was a well-respected former Thunderbird owner, Thunderbird Club President and AACA member, who is memorialized each year with a show in his name.

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