

Maurice and Jean Hawa's 1939 LaSalle Opera Coupe



By Maurice Hawa

Conceived as a companion to Cadillac in 1927, the LaSalle was priced between Buick and Cadillac. Built to Cadillac standards with Cadillac parts, the LaSalle was smaller but not as luxurious. During the depression years, the LaSalle kept Cadillac afloat due to its lower price. By 1940, however, the price gap with Buick had disappeared and the LaSalle was discontinued.

As a teenager I was interested in hot rods, but, in later years, changed to antique cars. After attending several car shows which helped me decide what type of antique I wanted, over the years, I purchased a 1958 Berkley, a 1939 Plymouth pickup, and a 1958 Dodge convertible. When the opportunity to participate in pre-war car tours arose, I sold all the antiques and in 2000 purchased the 1939 Cadillac LaSalle Model 5027 coupe mainly because it is a good road car and parts were available. Costing \$1,240.00 each, 2,525 LaSalle coupes were produced. It has a 322 cubic inch V8, 125 H.P. engine and painted Franconia beige iridescent. When describing the car to others, my wife says it's French vanilla.



Locating the LaSalle meant flying to Cleveland, Ohio to check out the car. It was in good condition and in

good running condition. The car was shipped home to Miami. Upon examining the car, my wife said that she



would not ride in a car that was so stinky. We shortly discovered that three beautiful petrified prairie voles had taken residence in the headliner of the roof. Since we found the seat's batting in the headliner, our guess was that the mother had nested in the headliner. Once the car was moved, she was unable to feed her babies resulting in their demise.

Wanting to safely and reliably participate in car tours, my goal was to make improvements. It was semi-restored when it was purchased, so I made sure all the mechanics were in good

working order. To help keep the car cooler in Florida's heat, the entire headliner, side panels, and seats were removed. I fully insulated the interior- top, sides, and flooring. When the appropriate flooring and upholstery fabrics arrived, the LaSalle was towed to Titusville where a long-time semi-retired friend took on the time-consuming task of redoing the front seats, the two opera seats, door and side panels, and floor carpeting. For safety reasons, seat belts and a third brake light were



installed inside the rear window. Because water would enter the brakes when raining, braking became hazardous. As a result, disc brakes were installed creating a much safer stopping experience.

After all the improvements, the car was ready for the Cadillac LaSalle National Driving Tour, two AACA Sentimental Tours, several AACA Regional Tours, tours involved with nine Invitational Mount Dora Spring Meets (for pre-war cars only), and four trips to the Concours at the Lake Mirror Classic Car Show in Lakeland, Florida. Not wanting any trophies, DNJ is

placed on the windshield card.

Our LaSalle is a driver, not a trailer queen; only twice has it been towed. One of the funniest encounters we had was on the way home from one of the Lake Mirror Classic Shows in pouring rain. Even though no one was doing the speed limit due to the rainy road conditions, we drove up to and passed an enclosed trailer. We smiled and waved at driver Mel Mann and his passenger Ira Shapiro. The funny part is that a seventy-five-year-old car was passing a very sporty Corvette. I don't know if any of us will ever forget that scenario.

