

Early Recollections Of A Cadillac V-16 Nut
The So. California Region begins
By Paul Schinnerer

My entry into the old car hobby began in 1950. I realize that may sound pre-historic to some of you. Don't laugh, a long life means more Cadillacs to restore. That was 1950 BC and AD. How can that be? That was before clubs and after Duesenbergs.

What sparked my interest in old cars was a Cadillac my brother Al and two of his fraternity brothers at the University of Southern California found wrecked in a farmers field in Rosamond, California near Edwards Air Force Base. They were able to buy it for \$75.00. Al said that the car was a 1930 Cadillac 4 door convertible with a 16 cylinder engine and was used to tow gliders. I learned later that the previous owner was John W. Meyer, test pilot for Northrop Aircraft. The car was used to tow his glider in the Flying Wing Program. Meyer told me in a telephone conversation in 1967 that he was in an airplane accident, had lost track of the Cadillac and wondered what happened to it. Some adventurous soul had stolen the V-16, rolled at high speed and was killed. My brother and his two friends replaced all 4 wheels and tires along with several mangled brake drums and drove it to Los Angeles.

I had heard of a 16 cylinder Cadillac but had never seen one and could hardly wait to look it over and get a ride. In my first view, the glory of past days was long gone. There stood a battered hulk with faded paint, what was left, terrible upholstery and rusted chrome. The hood had been removed to show the massive engine. Al pointed out the special Eddie Edmonds intake manifolds with 4 down draft carburetors. He said that it could beat any stock Ford. The headlights were gigantic. A home made windshield replaced the one demolished by the rollover.

The demonstration ride was a surprise, so smooth and powerful. What great performance. Until that ride old cars were of no interest to me and should be junked. My pride and joy was my two year old '47 Cadillac 62 coupe. However, this vehicle was different. Visions danced through my head of restoring it and racing new cars.

In 1950 after a year of hard use, more like hard abuse by the fraternity brothers, the "16" found a new home with me for \$150.00. They doubled their money. The appearance wasn't exactly as I had remembered. After hitting a tree and mangling a front fender, both front fenders were removed and piled up in the back seat along with the hood and headlights. All that was out in front was the engine and radiator.

The twenty mile trip home from Los Angeles to Long Beach in the All Weather Phaeton,

with its naked front end, caused many weird stares and looks of disdain. Because my parents would probably wonder what was wrong with me for buying an old wreck like that, I parked it on the street in front of a vacant lot until breaking the news.

The restoration of a twenty year old classic car in 1950 was an undeveloped art. Why brother, junk it and get a better one. I had no idea of the vast amount of work or difficult problems of finding or making parts. There was no Cadillac La Salle Club, no Classic Car Club of America, no Hemmings Motor News. Every local wrecking yard said, "We never junked one." What kept me enthused was being able to drive it between periods of restoration work. Those four carburetors overcame every Ford that I raced. I loved to punch the gas pedal flat on the floor and watch the speedometer climb to well over 40 in 1st gear.

The Edmonds manifolds lacked refinement in some areas. No heat from the modified exhaust manifolds warmed the carburetors. As a result the warm up period was prolonged with extensive back firing through each carburetor. One day I discovered that by slowing down to five miles per hour in 3rd gear, applying my left foot on the brake, retarding the spark and wiggling the gas pedal, there was a loud proof as flames shot out of all four carburetors about five feet high. At night the bright flash lit up the sky. I thought, "Wow, what can I do with this?"

On a balmy summer evening a few of my college friends gathered for a trip in the "16" to a drive in restaurant where the hot rodders hung out. We pooled our resources, nickels and dimes, enough for \$2.00 worth of gas. You remember when gas was 25 cents a gallon, or do you? It was a little past dark when the Cadillac roared into the drive in with a gigantic proof of flames. People began running. They thought it was blowing up. A crowd soon gathered to get a look at the fire breathing monster.

By 1959 my restoration was almost complete. All my hours of work, a labor of love, included everything with the exception of the chrome and upholstery. I remember talking to Slim who was finishing upholstering the back seat. He said, "Paul, if this seat could talk it would shock all of Long Beach."

Back in those years swing dancing was in vogue. My girl friend loved it too. We used to go to various clubs and dance the night away. One night I took my newly restored Cadillac, with painted on white walls, nineteen inch white wall tires were impossible to get, and parked right in front of the club to show it off. On the return trip to her home that night, the street light in front of the house was so bright that we moved to the back seat. It was very private back there, no quarter windows and a small back window. After awhile we noticed a small crowd around the car. A little past 2:00 in the morning people were returning from various night spots. They began looking the Cadillac over and even

tried to look through the windows. We crawled back in the corners out of sight until they all went away. Talk about an embarrassing moments.

The Self Starter began arriving monthly after my discovery of the Cadillac LaSalle Club in 1960. This included six to eight mimeographed pages of member written articles along with some classified ads.

An article appeared by Hollis Weihe titled, "Hydramatic Blues." He was having trouble finding parts for his 1942 Cadillac transmission. A few months later, June 1961, Hollis arrived at my door step and we met for the first time. As we looked over my cars, he expressed an interest in starting a region of the Cadillac LaSalle Club.

Hollis had recently met Bruce Fagen member of the Classic Car Club of America. With Bruce's encouragement he had written every local member in the National directory of the CLC inviting them to a meet at the Plush Horse Inn in Redondo Beach, California.

That first meeting was a resounding success. The parking lot was filled with shiny Cadillacs and LaSalles. The big surprise for Hollis was his election as the first director of Region 13.

My new friend, now the director of Region 13, and myself enjoyed many pleasant hours driving around in my Cadillac, occasionally above 80 miles an hour. Our conversation centered around growing the club membership.

A flyer dreamed up by Hollis extolled the virtues of a Local Cadillac LaSalle Club now being formed. It explained, "We are a group of 700 people throughout the world who are interested in the preservation and restoration of Cadillac and LaSalle automobiles. If you would be interested in joining us contact me." His name, address and phone number were added below. Every old Cadillac or LaSalle we found parked received a copy on it's windshield.

On a sojourn in the "16" we parked near a gas station. A gal yelled over, "Doesn't that drive like a truck?" Hollis shot back, "No more like a locomotive." There is some similarity but the Cadillac doesn't burn coal or belch out black smoke.

One night my friend Chuck and I entered a drive in restaurant and parked. A car hop came out and hung a tray on the door. A loud voice yelled, "Al Capone." Chuck announced loudly, "It is not; Al Capone died of a nasty disease in 1943." My friend actually named it.

A year of able leadership under the direction of Hollis produced a region that blossomed. One day he said to me, "Now it's your turn," and turned over the reins to me. I accepted and became the second director of Region 13.

Creating bi-monthly events kept me busy. An overflowing crowd of 10 or 12 cars made it all seem worthwhile. Photographed at a meet my Cadillac with myself standing next to it appeared in the Sunday newspaper right on the front page of the 2nd section. That was before drugs and gangs. The paper had something worthwhile to report. Talk about pre-historic times.

A new member, Cal Moxley, joined our group. The three of us enjoyed driving our jewels, trying out new restaurants and thinking up ways to improve the club. Cal had a fun vehicle, a 1939 LaSalle hearse, he found on a used car lot in Salt Lake City, Utah. Three curved arches adorned each side of the body. The condition was impressive if you could warm up to a conveyance that hauled around cold freight. Curious motorists were reluctant to pass when they looked over and saw the driver with a white shirt and shiny head. It looked like the real thing.

One pleasant Sunday afternoon, Cal and Hollis showed up in the hearse ready to go for a drive. We stopped by the local ice cream stand for some refreshment. Back on the road again passing drivers were surprised to see 3 people motoring along eating ice cream cones.

An event filled year sped by. Now it was Cal's turn to take over and become the 3rd director of Region 13. It was Cal's brilliant idea of a North/South Meet. The Northern California Region would come down halfway and the Southern California Region would go up halfway and meet for a joint event.

The first Mid-California Meet was held at Sequoia National Park in the fall of 1964. Hollis and I motored along in past grandeur enjoying the drive in my 2 tone maroon V-16. I promised myself that I would keep the speed down but after 50 miles we were cruising at 70 and 75 with bursts of speed of 80 to show the new cars. Twenty one Pre-War II Cadillacs and La Salles arrived. More that 75 enthusiasts were having a good time. It was the best success of any Region 13 Meet. My All Weather Phaeton completed 500 miles round trip with no problem at all; although it had an affinity for gas stations along the way.

The Cadillac had now been in my loving care for the past 14 years. The heads and pan had never been removed from the engine in all that time. It would go 6 more years, a total of 20, before needing an overhaul. Who said babbitted rods were no good. Today it's a lost art. Now we machine the rods and use inserts.

Member and good friend Ernie Kay joined our group. Now there were 4 of us dining at good restaurants and entertaining bystanders with our old fashioned cars. An interesting past time was cruising down town streets and watching pedestrians see us drive past. An elderly gentleman on a bus bench was telling his lady friend all about the Rolls Royce that was going by. Answering questions kept us entertained, such as: "What is it? What is it worth? How many miles to the gallon? What is the top speed?" The one that was surprising to hear was, "Did you buy it brand new?"Did I look that old?

"I love a parade," the saying goes. The "16" did too including 5 Hollywood Christmas parades. The previous night before a Hollywood event, Mary and I were visiting my cousin and husband. They were entertaining a young couple they had sponsored from Vietnam. New to this country, their ability to speak English was practically nil. We smiled, were friendly and used sign language to help the evening pass pleasantly.

The following night in the Christmas parade my passengers were Fred McMurray seated in the front and June Haver and 2 daughters in the rear. We cruised along slowly being observed by thousands of people and made many stops. I was thankful for a clutch pedal that is easy to push. It was in use for 2 hours controlling the stop and go pace. An occasional glance at the temperature gauge showed it in the normal range. This can be a problem at such a crawling speed. A major concern was scratched paint by autograph seekers who were all over the car. About half way through there was a televised interview. The camera was on my left and focused across me over to Fred and gave the television audience several minutes of our display.

Back home at my cousin's place the young couple were watching on TV and were thrilled when they saw the movie star they had met the night before.

In 1969 Roy Schneider became our new director. I first met Roy in 1965 when he moved from Ohio to California. A lot hard work has gone into the many Cadillac motor books he has published. A copy of "Sixteen Cylinder Motor Cars" has become quite worn from all my use as a reference. His directorship was repeated a 2nd time when he took over again in '92 for another 10 years.

The Cadillac has opened the door to many unusual events. Now it was time for a National Figure. Richard Nixon was campaigning for President in 1970. He was making an appearance at a hotel in Long Beach. The newspaper reported that at 7:30 PM he would leave the hotel and caravan to Disneyland. I had an idea of showing up in the Cadillac just as they were leaving. Two of my car friends, Stan and Pete, planned to go with me. Each of us rented a straw hat and a blazer for this great occasion. We made a large sign that covered the trunk rack. Stan had a bugle that could be used to announce us. Arriving a few

minutes early, there was no place to park for miles. A fire hydrant was the answer. A young couple came by and asked, "Are you part of the Nixon Campaign." I said, "Yes we just blew in from Chicago last night." At 7:30 we made our grand entrance with a loud blast on the bugle. The sign on the back read, "Re-elect Hoover". People were laughing and enjoying our show. A cop directing traffic looked at our sign and remarked, "I'm with you."

Those are a few highlights of my first 20 years with "Old Red." I could go on for 35 more.. At a recent car show and swap meet the All Weather Phaeton was parked with some cars that were for sale. A young man came by and asked, "Are you selling your car?" I said, "No I don't think so, not after owning it for 55years."