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October 2017 Newsletter

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RECENT EVENTS:

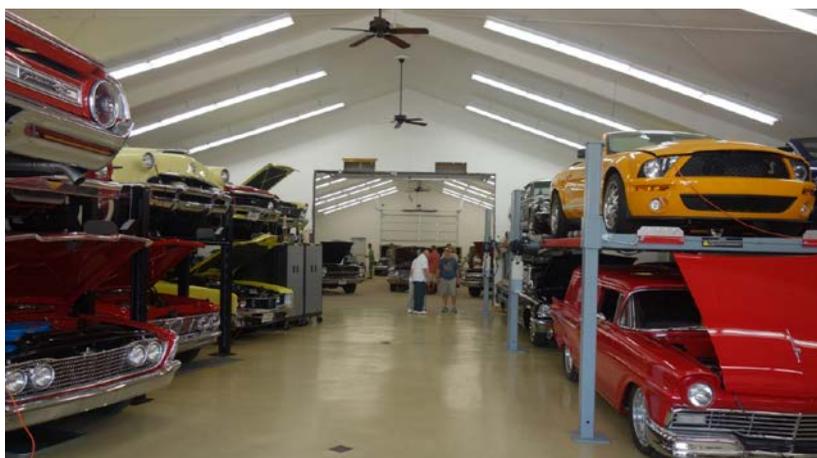
Tour Al Geisler's Garage Saturday, September 16th

Twenty one members gathered at Eat'n Park in Robinson and enjoyed breakfast and friendly conversation. Bob and Betty Macek led the caravan of Thunderbirds to Al Geisler's annual cruise. Upon arrival we joined several other clubs who came to join in the festivities. The Geislers provided main entrees and the Pitt Bird members supplied covered dishes to enhance the wonderful lunch. The main attraction was Al's car collection made up of 50's and 60's big block Fords. This collection of unique automobiles was in pristine condition. The Pitt Birds want to thank Al and Debbie Geisler for hosting this event, and to Bob and Betty Macek for leading the event.



RECENT EVENTS:

Tour Al Geisler's Garage - *Continued*



UPCOMING EVENTS:

Garage Tour in Salem, OH Saturday, October 14th

Member will meet at Denny's Restaurant in Cranberry at 9:00 AM

GPS: 1346 Old Freedom Rd, Cranberry Twp, PA 16066

We will caravan to Salem, OH via the back roads and arrive at John Kufleitner's Classic Car Collection. We will tour the facility and then have lunch at the Dutch Haus Restaurant in Salem.

If you have any questions contact Jon Strebeck at 724-272-4558.

Autumn Meeting Saturday, November 18th

The Pitt Birds will meet at **2:00 PM on Saturday, November 18th** at Eat'n Park at the Homestead Waterfront.

GPS: 245 E Waterfront Dr, Homestead, PA 15120

Agenda items are:

- Nomination of Officers
- Suggested Activities and Tours for 2018
- Holiday Dinner Plans

Nomination of Officers

The Pitt Birds are soliciting nomination suggestions for the following offices in this club:

President

Vice President

Secretary

Treasurer

If you are interested or know of someone who is interested, please contact Wayne Bane at 724-594-7482 or dbane3413@gmail.com.

The position for the Newsletter Editor is also available.

UPCOMING INTERNATIONAL EVENTS:



MEMBERSHIP:

Current Membership: **68 Members**

Interested in Joining an International Thunderbird Club?

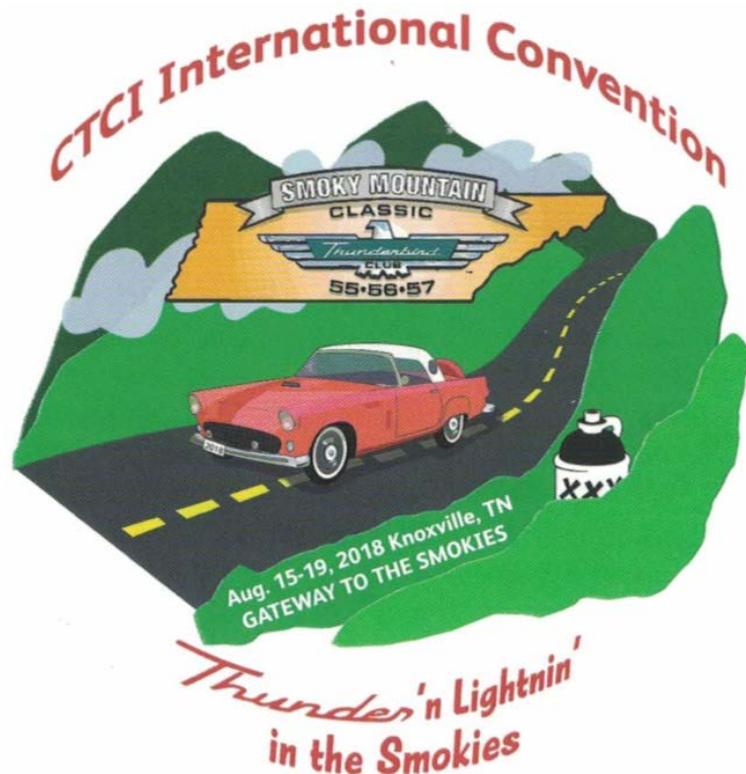
The Pitt Birds Thunderbird Club is a chapter club with the Classic Thunderbird Club International (CTCI) and the International Thunderbird Club (ITC). Both CTCI and ITC have regional and international events, provide excellent technical advice, publish bi-monthly magazines, offer vendor sourcing, and articles about other local clubs. Membership information to CTCI or ITC can be found by visiting the following web sites.

Classic Thunderbird Club International: www.ctci.org

Then click on "Become a Member" on the Home page.

International Thunderbird Club: www.intl-thunderbirdclub.com

Then click on the "Membership" button on the Home page.



FOR SALE:

NEW – Men's and Ladies' Golf Shirts:

Turquoise / Thunderbird blue golf shirt with the Pitt Birds logo, contact Mary Beth Meyer at 412-818-5898. The price is \$25.00. Shipping and handling to your address is an additional \$5.00.

Tee Shirts:

With the Pitt Birds club logo are for sale for \$15.00 each. Shipping and handling to your address is an additional \$5.00. Limited supply remaining, 2 medium sizes available.

Contact Ann Augustine at: 724-468-3202.

Endangered Species - 1956 Ford Thunderbird

April, 2013 issue of Hemmings Classic Car. – Mark J. McCourt



Through the years, the Ford Motor Company has built many vehicles that have come to be regarded as genuine classics, cars that were so right for their time that they became timeless.

Noted upstate New York Model A parts specialist Don Roberts knows Fords, and his sprawling garage is home to many of those timeless classics, including numerous Model A's, a Skyliner retractable hardtop, a first-generation Mustang and a clap-door Lincoln Continental. Arguably the most iconic automobile in his collection is also the most original: It's this delightful, period-perfect 1956 Thunderbird.

Ford's new "personal car" caused a big stir upon its introduction in 1955; here was a sporty-looking, sophisticated two-seat convertible with genuine performance and grown-up comfort and build quality. And there was more of a good thing for 1956, when the Thunderbird received an optional 312 cu in "Y-8"--contemporary Ford-speak for their overhead-valve Y-block V-8--as well as a Continental-style spare tire and other detail refinements. This externally mounted spare, along with opening vent doors in the front fenders and the optional porthole-enlivened Colonial White fiberglass hardtop, cement Don's Fiesta Red Thunderbird as being a model specimen of this model year.

While the standard model's engine was a 292 cu in four-barrel V-8 that made 202hp, our feature car is powered by the "Thunderbird Special V-8," which was a larger displacement, high-compression option whose output was tied to transmission choice.

This car left Ford's Dearborn plant with a Fordomatic three-speed automatic transmission, and therefore received the most powerful engine: The 312-cu.in. V-8 that developed 225hp and 324 lbs ft of torque via its a 9.0:1 compression ratio. Manual transmission Thunderbirds--be they standard three-speeds or three-speeds plus selectable electric overdrive--had 8.4-compression and made 10 fewer horsepower and seven fewer foot-pounds of torque.

But a glance inside Don's 1956 T-Bird reveals not two, but three pedals in the driver's footwell, as well as a manual gearshift emerging from the center tunnel. What gives? It's back to this car's original owner, a local man who lived about five miles away and who purchased the car from Harry Smith Ford, a former dealership that was located fewer than 10 miles from Don's Mohawk, New York, home. Don explains, "The story was that he was dating a girl in Connecticut. The automatic transmission used too much gas for him, driving back and forth, at 23 cents a gallon, or whatever it then cost. He had the automatic taken out, the power brake booster removed and the Ford overdrive manual gearbox installed. The person who did this conversion is still alive--I see him quite often. He also changed the ignition system to use a different distributor, and put a set of gauges in it."

This car's enthusiastic original owner had five additional instruments installed: In place of the Signal-Seek radio's dash-top speaker went a vacuum gauge, in a holder he'd fashioned without damaging the original surface; an under-dash console was built to hold functioning Stewart Warner oil pressure, oil temperature, water temperature, and ammeter gauges. So this Thunderbird became a unique car, with its personalized instrumentation; top-of-the-line engine power with manual transmission; and full complement of options, including the engine dress-up kit, a heater, both soft and hard tops, full wheel covers, rear fender shields, Swift Sure power drum brakes, a four-way power seat, Lifeguard seat belts and the aforementioned radio.

A glance at the odometer reveals the Thunderbird has traveled a whisker over 52,000 miles from new, and virtually all were added by that roaming Romeo. "The person who bought it last used the car in 1961: The registration on it when I bought it in December of 1975 indicated that it was good through January 1962," Don recalls. "Supposedly, once he married that Connecticut girl he'd been dating, she didn't like the car that much, and they stopped using it--he'd driven the car for less than six years. It sat in their garage, where I'd seen it a few times when driving by the house.

Continued on the next page.

Endangered Species - 1956 Ford Thunderbird - *Continued*

"He traded it in on a new truck at the Ford dealership in Ilion, about three miles away, in 1975. I went right down to purchase that all-original Thunderbird. The dealer said, 'You're not getting that car!' I'd more or less assumed that might be the case, but then one night, he called me and said, 'When are you coming down to get that Thunderbird?' That was the way he operated. I said, 'I'll be down there tomorrow!'

"It had 47,350 miles on it. I bought it for a fair price. He'd told me, 'Don't start the car until you rebuild the engine.' Well, I couldn't do that... I had it running by that afternoon," Don laughs.

Indeed, this car's Thunderbird Special V-8 has never been apart. "To be safe, I installed all new brakes and brake lines, but as far as the engine and transmission, I didn't change any major mechanical parts." When he got the car, Don also got the original owner's manual, the dash-top radio speaker (which he reinstalled), the factory distributor, the power brake booster and the cold-weather hood scoop cover plate. "I got pretty much everything that came off the car, except the tonneau cover. Maybe if I'd pursued it a bit more, that would have turned up, too. At the time, I didn't give too much thought to it," he says.

So how did the beautiful two-seater remain such a low-mileage cherry? "I started my Model A parts business in 1976, and I've gone to many shows towing a trailer of Model A parts, so I couldn't take the T-Bird too. We've taken it to some local shows through the years, but never on any major road trips," Don admits. "Like many things, it probably should have been used more."

This Thunderbird wears its 57 years gracefully, offering surprisingly few signs of age. That factory-applied Fiesta Red paint--a deep salmon pink hue that unmistakably evokes the 1950s--bears a few stone chips and scuffs, but still gives off a warm glow in the overcast light of an early December day. The body's brightwork shines, even if the front bumper chrome has some age pits and the rear bumper corners are a touch sooty from the hot, melodious exhaust that exits through them. Keeping the front seat covered with a cloth has spared the two-tone red and white vinyl upholstery from stains and sun fade, even if a few of the seams in the driver's seat bottom have let go, and the raised edges of the telescoping, deep-dish Lifeguard steering wheel have worn through their interior color-matched tint.

Even though circumstances precluded Don and his wife, Sondra, from extensively enjoying this fabulous Fifties Ford on the road, the car has always been properly maintained and carefully stored. "I wax it once a year, and change the filter and oil every two years, because I don't exercise it as much as I should," he says. "I use 10W-30 detergent oil, and being that the engine has a filter, I feel you can use that. I've been happy to switch over to non-ethanol gas, which I can get locally, because I think that makes a difference for it, especially when you're not driving it all the time. We've changed the tires a couple of times through the years because of their age; it was about three years ago that I put these [bias ply] Firestones on it, in the correct 6.70 x 15 size."

Although the car hadn't been run in over a year before we arrived to take photos, it only required a fresh battery to start at the first twist of the key. Unseasonably warm weather meant a top-down ride was quite agreeable, and the car accelerated through the gears with appealing verve and a quietly throaty report; it also consented to idle extensively and to be repositioned numerous times without complaint.

In the decades that he's owned the Thunderbird, Don has acquired a correct, early-1956 air-cooled Fordomatic trans-mission, just because. "I'm probably not inclined to switch back to the automatic," he says. "On one hand, as you get older, it's probably better to have the automatic, but I've always enjoyed the fact that this car is standard. It gives you a different feel--it's a lot different than driving a standard Model A!"

When we press this lifelong car guy about what the Thunderbird means to him, he reflects on his vehicular history. "It was built the year after I graduated from high school; at that time, coming up with the financial arrangement to buy more than a \$100 car was impossible. I also remember that my dad traded a 1951 Studebaker on a new 1956 Ford Victoria four-door hardtop with the Thunderbird V-8; that was quite a car at the time. When this came along, it was like going back and reliving the times I enjoyed using that car. Growing up, wishing you had something... and when you are able to finally afford to get it, that's kind of nice."