

Spring... on the **ROAD**

This year's featured vehicle is David Benton's 1965 Chevrolet Chevelle Malibu SS...page 2



Larry Hagedorn's 1986 Iroc Z Camaro...page 8



Mitchem Family 1957 Ford Fairlane... page 12





The '88 restoration of a '65 Chevelle

BY ROXIE MURPHY
ASSISTANT EDITOR
rmurphy@wardpub.com

A diamond in the rough

In the days before the internet, car enthusiasts like David Benton poured over the classified pages in local newspapers looking for the perfect description of their next could-be project.

According to Rosebud man David Benton, those descriptions came laden with undesirable descriptions.

"I bought it in 1988-89 in the Festus, Crystal City area," Benton said. "I think I found it in the St. Louis newspaper classifieds and went and bought it. I liked it. I had one back when I was younger. When I was looking for a car to put together, this one come up and I went on and got it."

PHOTOS BY DENNIS WARDEN

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Chevelle • from page 2

No picture of the car was listed, just a description of a rough 1965 Chevelle Malibu.

“It was just the body,” Benton said. “No motor, no interior, no nothin’ when I got it. I restored it from there.”

He paid \$4,000 for the shell of the car. On the upside, it was painted. On the downside, it needed some body work.

“There was no motor, no transmission, no interior, the body was painted on it, but then when I bought it, it needed more work,” Benton said.

Like every car enthusiast will tell you, what is now in pieces was once together and will go back again. If the project dabbler has sat on the project long enough, he who purchases the conveyance inherits the pieces. That’s kind of how this story goes.

“I had got a lot of parts with it when I got it,” Benton said. “All the parts, I was able to clean them up and use most of the original stuff.”

One piece at a time

One of the challenges of restoring a car in 1988 was the lack of on-hand resources. Parts catalogs and car clubs were the starting point of information when searching for a

See **CHEVILLE** on Page 4



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Chevelle • from page 3

part or needing a hand.

Benton used both.

"I had to buy a new interior for it, a new top, a new motor," Benton said. "A lot of the stuff was found locally, but not too far away. I didn't have to travel too much to find parts, but we did have to spend a lot of time at swap meets and stuff like that to find stuff."

The former Ford Motor employee figured keeping the

car original was the best way to go. He picked up parts and pieces along the way, eventually purchasing an automatic 327 V8 motor. A friend worked on the motor and helped him to install it.

"It runs pretty good," Benton said, describing the engine as a pur. "It has Cragar wheels on it that were in style in '65 - It's not the original engine, but that is what it would have come out in '65."

Restoring a car is pricy, but Benton is one of the founding

members of the Gasconade Timing Association (GTA) Car Club. If he was stumped, he asked for help.

"Most of the work I done all myself," he said. "I took it to John Scego and John done a little body work on it. I had taken to (Little Sid's Upholstery) in Rolla and they put a new top on it."

The vinyl white interior of the car was also Benton's pick.

See **CHEVILLE** on Page 6

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BENTON'S 1965 Chevelle Malibu SS was the top of the line. It came with air conditioning (unusual for a convertible), power windows, power steering, tilt steering wheel and a power convertible. A nice touch on the car is the Chevrolet emblem on the rear view mirror (photo far right).



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WHEN BENTON purchased the Chevelle it was lacking an engine, transmission and the rag top. The body had been painted but still needed work.



Chevelle • from page 4

“The special features, it’s got power steering, tilted steering wheel, electric windows, rag top, and AC — which was rare. With convertibles, people didn’t usually buy AC,” Benton said. “A lot of convertibles wasn’t equipped with AC. This one has pretty well every option in ‘65.”

Staying consistent with the project, Benton is proud of how she turned out.

“It took me a couple of years to get it all put back together,” Benton said. “It is pretty well what it was.”

Cruising in style with the Chevelle SS

Porsche Red and fully loaded with a white rag top and vinyl seats, the Chevelle stands out when Benton and his wife take her for a cruise.

“We’ve had it in quite a few car shows, but not in the last few years because I have other cars I’ve been driving,” Benton said. “This one has been setting.”

The ‘60s GTA classic car lover regularly cruises with like-minded gearheads.

“Most of the guys there (in the GTA Car Club) we’ve all run around together for years,” Benton said. “We’ve just done a lot of cruising with it through the years, going on trips with the car club and me and the wife taking cruises in it. We’ve won some trophies and all with it.”

In the last few years, the cruises have slowed down and the couple has entered it in fewer car shows.

“It’s mainly just in the garage,” he said. “We get it out, drive it, and enjoy it. We’ve had it for 30 years.”

While he continues to do general maintenance, the Chevelle hasn’t had any major upgrades on its restoration since it was completed in the early 1990s.

“Now in some of these car shows, it’s hard to compete with people who’ve spent \$100,000 on these cars,” Benton said. “I give \$4,000 for it. I probably had \$10,000 in it in ‘88 by the time I got done with it. Now it wouldn’t be nothing to put \$50,000 in it.”

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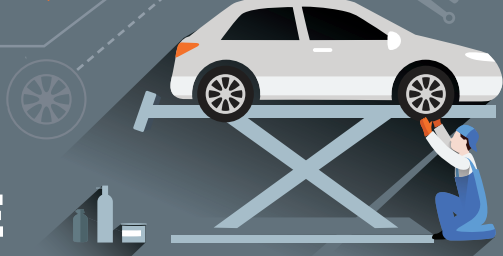
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WIKIPEDIA: The Chevrolet Chevelle is a mid-sized automobile produced by in three generations 1964 through 1977. Chevelle was one of Chevrolet's most successful nameplates. Body styles included coupes, sedans, convertibles, and station wagons. The "Super Sport" versions were produced through the 1973 model year and Llagunas from 1973 through to 1976. The Malibu was the top-of-the-line model through 1972 and completely replaced the Chevelle nameplate starting with the redesigned and downsized 1978 model year.




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Go Further



Racing the Iroc Z Camaro

BY ELISE BROCHU
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
ebrochu@wardpub.com



Hagedorn Collision Repair has been operating just outside of Hermann for years, but people might not know they're also home to Hagedorn Performance Engines, supplying high performance racing engines for cars around the country. Owner Larry Hagedorn's love of cars and racing was evident in every smile and every story he told.

"I had a 68 Chevelle with a four speed that I played around with," said Larry, about his start in racing. "I'd just go out and just kind of race it around, try and find a private road and I'd just get stupid with that out in the road. You know, I'd say, like mid 90s."

From there, Larry met a man selling a junior dragster car after his kids had aged out. The man let Larry's son, Kegan, race the car a few times, and Kegan was hooked.

"So, we bought it from him," Larry said. "But he still always helped us with it. He taught me everything I needed to know about junior dragsters, but he'd always put together old motors and pieces and parts. And the car was never that consistent to win, and he'd get aggravated. So, I kept the

See **CAMARO** on Page 9

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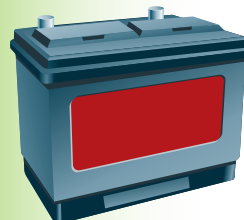
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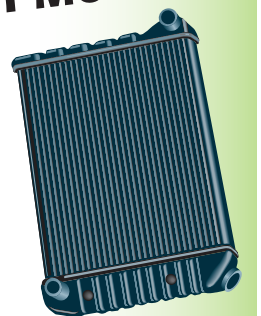
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Camaro • from page 8

car, but I bought a brand-new motor, put a brand spankin' new motor in it. And he came out and he won a championship with a car the first year we put that new motor in it, because the car was consistent. He was doing his job and he would always have a killer reaction time, but the car went way off and that would be disappointing. So, I bought a new motor and put it in, and he won a championship."

"The second year," Larry continued. "We kept on having flats. We bought a brand-new body to go with the motor, and then we kept on having flat tires on the front during the run. And we spent all summer trying to figure out why, and it would slow him down when we had a flat tire during the run. And we just lost the championship by just a little bit." It turned out there was a defect in the wheels, which they replaced. "And the next year again, he won a championship again," Larry said.

Keegan grew up doing body work in the shop, but they were seeing long lead times for anything that required a machinist, so he chose to go to SAM Tech (School of Automotive Machinists & Technology), in Houston, Texas. "Probably the premier engine building school in the world," said his



LARRY HADEGORN (left) considers Zach Ahern (in wheelchair) their number one fan. The race team presented Ahern the trophy after a race in Madison, Ill, at the Gateway Racetrack (Worldwide Technology Raceway). Also pictured (from left) are Kegan Hagedorn, Rebecca Hagedorn and Ted Dixon the race team's manager.

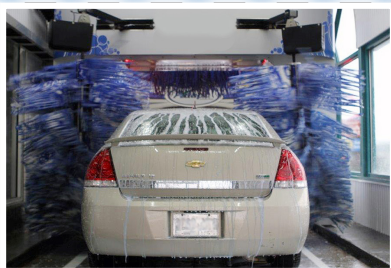
proud father. "Everybody you see working, like in drag racing and in NASCAR and all that, most of the guys working in the pits came from that school."

Larry sent a race car to Texas with Keegan, since there were several tracks close to SAM Tech, and bought a dragster to race himself while Keegan was away, but racing wasn't

the same for either member of the father-son team without the other.

See **CAMARO** on Page 10

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THE 1986 Iroc Z Camaro body was completed at Hagedorn Collison Repair in Hermann.

Camaro • from page 9

“So, he decided he could have gone anywhere,” Larry said. “But he decided to stick around me. We bought a few pieces of equipment, we started doing a few motors, and we did our own motors. Plus, we’ve done some for other people. Well, those motors started winning races for these people.” People started asking the winners who did their motor, which brought the Hagedorns more business, so they added on and put in a full machine shop.

“That was 10 years ago,” Larry said. “And we got so much work now, we turn a lot of work away. We got a lot of high-profile customers. Our typical motors are at 1500 to 4000 horsepower.”

Then they competed on Street Outlaws: Fastest In America (S1 E1), with Keegan racing the 1986 Iroc Z Camaro. “And then a lot of people got to know us from that, and that made us even more popular,” Larry said, smiling.

Now, Larry says, they do bracket racing and outlaw racing, both locally and in Memphis. Kegan does most of the driving. “I stopped driving the car because I don’t fit in there,” Larry said, indicating that his height is an issue. “And, actually, he’s a little bit better driver.”

Bracket racing is something anybody can do,” Larry explained, because you’re racing against your own estimation of how fast you’ll go, and hoping yours is more accurate than your opponent’s. Skill comes in both in choosing your time and in trying to finish closer to your estimated time than your opponent finishes to theirs, without going over.

“Reaction time is more than half of it,” he said. “And the other half is the playing the stripe. And the third part is having a very consistent car that repeats.”

“You could probably make anything (consistent enough),” Larry said. “When gas got so expensive, and it was so far to travel and all that, (Jeremy McKague) had a Geo Metro that he would go footbrake. I mean, it was

See **CAMARO** on Page 11



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Camaro • from page 10

like a 18 to 20 second quarter mile. And he was winning. So that's, I mean, Jeremy is very good."

Among his other cars, Larry also has a '66 Nova and his flagship '67 Camaro. His next tube chassis car will be the 1968 Chevelle SS he bought from Schollmeyer's, outside of Chamois. Although the Chevelle's paint is mostly gone now, its original paint job was Matador Red with custom wildlife scenes on both sides.

The tube chassis, Larry explained, helps the car get certified as safe for racing speed. Although certification isn't required for outlaw racing, Larry said most racers choose to have their cars certified so the cars can be driven on an NHRA (National Hot Rod Association) track. In addition to reinforcing the chassis, they have to stretch the quarter panels to make room for the large racing wheels.

"Don't leave the gas cap off," Larry added, pulling up a photo of a car engulfed in flames. "I was driving when this happened. Don't leave the gas cap off. The gas tank's right up in here (front of car) and it launched. It runs on methanol, and (that) came back and it lit."



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1957 Ford Fairlane rises from the dead to drive again

BY ELISE BROCHU
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
ebrochu@wardpub.com

When 19-year-old Delmar Mitchem paid \$300 for a 1957 Ford Fairlane 500 Convertible in May of 1969, he had no idea that car was going to change his life.

Fifteen-year-old Rhonda Nichols, who had recently moved back to Chamois, was standing in her yard with a friend from St. Charles, when Delmar drove by in the then bright blue Fairlane. “And she says, ‘Oh, who’s that,’” Rhonda remembered, “And I said ‘I don’t know, but I intend to find out.’”

Before she did, Delmar blew out the Fairlane’s engine hot-rodding, and his dad parked the car behind their house.

When they finally met, Delmar made the first move, albeit in another car. “My grandmother and my dad had the café here in town, Kat’s Café,” Rhonda explained, “and one day I was walking home from there. I’d been working down there. And he pulls up alongside me and he says ‘Hey, do you want a ride home?’ And I said ‘My parents always told me not to get in the car with strangers.’ Well, it ended up it was only like a block from where I lived.” So, she let him drive her home.

The couple dated briefly, but Rhonda’s parents felt she was too young to be in a serious relationship.



THREE GENERATIONS of Mitchems, Æi Ryan, Delmar, and Tanner, Æi have enjoyed the restoration process on the 1957 Ford Fairlane.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RHONDA MITCHEM

When Delmar was drafted to Vietnam in September of 1969, the couple broke up.

See **MITCHEM** on Page 13

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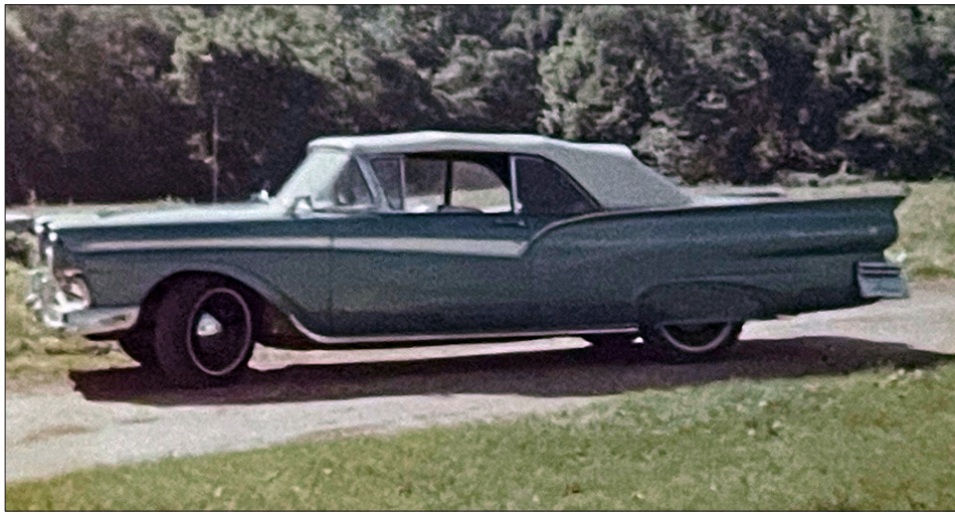
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Mitchem • from page 12

When he came home in 1971, it took less than a day for them to get back together. “I was walking home from school, and I saw him go by in a car. Not this one,” she said, referring to the Fairlane, “And I said, ‘Oh my gosh, he’s home.’ I ran home, threw down my books, and started walking down the street. So, who pulls up asked me if I wanted a ride? And the rest is history.”

The Fairlane, however, sat for close to 45 years. “Naturally, it went down to rust,” Delmar said, “And we just let it sit and sit and sit, because it was going to be a big money project, and, at the time, starting out, we didn’t have the money for it. And along came a couple of kids, and we definitely didn’t have money for it then. So finally, (Rhonda) said, ‘Well, if we’re going to get it fixed and all before you retire, we’ll just borrow the money and do it.’ So that’s what we did.”

Rhonda joked that even though Delmar was driving the Fairlane the first time she saw him, it took almost 50 years for her to be able to ride in it. “He blew (the engine), and then he went into the service,” she said, “So the only time I really got to ride in it was when we were towing it from one storage location to another storage lo-



cation. Until we had it restored. Then I finally got the ride in it.”

When they were finally ready, the couple took the Fairlane to Davey and Jim Schollmeyer, who, with the help of Tim Troesser, fully restored it. The work took several years, as the couple had the work done as they could afford it. “It was a lot of money,” Rhonda said,

“A lot of money, because there wasn’t an inch of it that Schollmeyer’s didn’t have to touch. I mean, not an inch.”

“The frame had a little bitty dent in it,” Delmar elaborated, “And they took that

out, because they said, ‘You know, if you want to sell it, or something like that, people would look at it.’ And the dent in the frame was about like that (smaller than a nickel). I thought, ‘I would have never even thought of it or done it.’ But they did an excellent job on it.”

Delmar had planned to paint the car metallic blue or something similar, but one day their kids were out and found a toy 1957 Ford convertible that looked like Delmar’s, and it was painted a mellow green. “We were discussing the color and Rhonda said, ‘Well, why don’t you go with that color?’ So I thought about it for a while, and then I said ‘Well, she’s right. It’s a pretty color.’ And I’ve had all kinds of dif-

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ferent people talk about how pretty it is on account of the color, so she come out a winner on that one.”

“Old car enthusiasts have either got to have a passion or a lot of money,” Rhonda added.

Delmar said the Fairlane is basically all original, except for a 302 motor and a transmission with overdrive out of a 1988 Crown Victoria. He said he’s had other cars with bigger engines that heated up more, but he and Rhonda just wanted something that would cruise, so they went with the 302. They have also added power steering and air conditioning, and hope to add power brakes in the future.

The parts, Rhonda said, were sourced from all over the country, but the labor was all Osage County, including restoration of the top and interior.

The Fairlane is Bright White over Mill Valley Green, with Coker tires and an Acacia Green interior.

The Mitchems have taken the Fairlane to three car shows, winning one first place, one runner up, and one best interior. Delmar also enjoys taking it to local Moonshiner’s car shows at Thriftway in Linn, and to the Blue Oval shows in Hermann. Delmar said winning the people’s choice award at a Blue Oval show meant a lot to him. “That’s everybody who looked at it, walked past it. That’s the important one,” he said.

Rhonda also said they don’t see many other ‘57 Ford convertibles. “You see ‘57 Ford retractable,” she said, “where it’s the hard top that goes down into the trunk. And you see ‘57 hard tops, but the ‘57 Ford’s just not as popular as that same era in Chevies. So anyway, you just don’t see many of them. And it seems like people are really, I mean, they love it when they see it.”

“They do have quite a few Chevy convertibles,” Delmar added, “but not many soft tops like that. Like she

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said, the retractable is a popular one that everybody likes, and this is the one that there's not a lot of."

"I watch a lot of car shows on TV," Delmar continued, "And I look for them, and you very seldom see them. You'll see some '57s, you know, four door hardtop, like she said, a retractable, but very seldom do you see a convertible with the soft top."

The couple said the Fairlane belongs to both of them and has been a family affair. Their son Ryan passed on Nov. 1, 2016, but the couple said he was extremely proud of the car. Their grandson, Tanner, took it to prom, and their younger grandson, Landon, may as well. "I got to teach him how to drive it," Delmar said, "He's never drove it yet."

The Mitchems hope to someday take the Fairlane on a trip down historic Route 66, which begins in Chicago and ends in Los Angeles. "It's on the bucket list," Rhonda said.

"It gets about 15 - 18 miles a gallon on gas," Delmar added, "That's gonna make a difference, right?"

When not being driven, the Fairlane is garaged, and the convertible top is treated

regularly. Delmar also tries to avoid driving it in bad weather, or when the roads have been treated for snow. "I don't put 100 miles a year on it," Delmar said.

"It's his baby," Rhonda added, "He would probably choose it over me."

"It would be a hard decision," Delmar joked.



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