

Quality Originals



Without question, the fastest-growing trend in the collector car hobby is that of original cars. Finally, after way too many decades of unnecessarily painting and restoring cars simply because they weren't perfect, people are now recognizing the value of original cars. The dark days of unnecessary restoration are now over, at least for the majority of us knowledgeable enthusiasts and collectors.

Let's face it: Do we really need to see another flawless black Model T or perfect red '57 Bel Air, something that has been rebuilt to a condition far superior to what it was when new? No, not when battle-scarred original versions are so much more historically relevant—and interesting to look at! Unrestored cars have history, which is completely wiped away when they are restored.

Original cars are our only glimpse into the automotive past. They afford us the wonderful opportunity to study firsthand the way manufacturing techniques were carried out during America's previous decades of automobile production. We can see how the assembly line workers applied the paint; how the upholstery was stitched and carpet was bound; how the wood was cut, shaped and joined, and which types of fasteners were used for specific applications.

Of course, the biggest issue facing the hobby when it comes to original cars is that many people don't understand the true meaning of the word "original." Just because a car has never been restored, yet has been repainted, doesn't necessarily qualify it as being original. Unrestored, yes, but certainly not original. Simply put, if a car's seats have been reupholstered, then the car is no longer original. If the engine and surrounding compartment has been repainted and detailed, then the car is no longer original. If the frame and undercarriage have been undercoated, then the car is no longer original. And, most importantly, if a car has been completely repainted, then that car is without question not original.

Notice I said, "has been completely repainted." A car can still be considered original if it's had just one door repainted—or perhaps the trunklid was resprayed, or maybe just the lower portion of a quarter panel. If the large majority of the factory-applied paint remains on the car, and that paint is still in good condition and hasn't deteriorated or faded far beyond the original color, then that car is looked upon as being a well-preserved original.

So, what amount of changes or deterioration can a car have and still be considered original? More importantly, at what point is an original car worthy of being preserved in as-is condition, as opposed to being an original car that really could benefit from a thorough restoration?

To create a professional standard of evalua-

tion, this issue's Personality Profile subject, David Burroughs has launched a fascinating new event dedicated to original collector cars. It's called the Survivor Collector Car show, and it's held on the Sunday following the three-day long Bloomington Gold Corvette show each June. The beautiful Pheasant Run Resort in St. Charles, Illinois, which is less than an hour's drive west of Chicago, is the show's annual home.

With David at the helm, the Survivor board is made up of 14 individuals with varying areas of expertise within the collector-car field, who can accurately judge a car's originality. Because I recently published my book, *It's Only Original Once*, David selected me to be on the Survivor board.

Judging at this year's show was a real eye-opener in terms of evaluating the different levels of originality. Some cars looked showroom-new while others looked well used, yet the one common bond between them was that they all were unrestored originals. Each car was evaluated on a sliding percentage scale, which determines that car's classification and, ultimately, its certification award.

The ultimate Survivor award, which is equivalent to the prestigious Benchmark Award that is bestowed upon only the very best original Corvettes, is the ZZenith award. The ZZenith is awarded only to cars that are a minimum of 40 years old and have less than 10 percent deterioration and alteration from when they were first built. The second most distinguished award is the Freeze Frame, which is given to those vehicles 30 years old or older that have less than 25 percent deterioration or alteration. And the third most significant honor is called the Limited Survivor award, which is for 20-year-old or older vehicles that exhibit less than 50 percent deterioration or alteration from new.

This year's event drew 68 cars, of which only 13 earned a well-deserved ZZenith; 19 received Freeze Frame awards, and 17 got a Limited Survivor certification. The cars varied from a 1948 Packard Custom Eight Deluxe to a '62 Studebaker Lark. And looking at a perfectly preserved '62 Thunderbird, '66 VW Beetle and an original-owner '68 Shelby Mustang G.T. 500KR, all of which earned ZZenith certification, made roaming the tree-lined show field an incredibly stimulating and unique experience.

If you own an unrestored car or truck, and have been thinking about refinishing its scratched factory paint or faded upholstery, don't. With each day that passes, original cars increase in rarity as the quest for restoration perfection continues. Better than shop manuals, an original car is a tangible example of the way automobiles used to be built. So keep 'em original; future generations of car enthusiasts depend on it. 🐞

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