

IF You Have to Ask...

by Michael Schindel

The first time I met Bill Hahn was, eight years ago, at the first SAE Car Show. He was displaying a drop-dead gorgeous Mercedes 220 SE Cabriolet. It took Best of Show. The evidence of his skills was obvious in the execution of the restoration he had performed on that 220 SE.

A few years later, I came to realize the depth of his antique automobile knowledge. A good friend of mine, Bob Affleck, has an HRG. He approached Bill at one of the SAE shows about restoring it for him. To his amazement, Bill knew what an HRG was (they were built in England from 1935 to 1956. They only produced about 250 cars—all roadsters except for one coupe, Bob's.)

The church Bill attends, North Way Christian Community, puts on a car cruise every Friday night from May through September. (Pretty cool pastor, eh?) Well, I met up with Bill at the opening night Star Lite Car Cruise and tried to satisfy my inquiring mind regarding this hobby of old cars.

M.S: WHY?? What makes people spend so much time and money on an old car?

B.H: I'm a little surprised at this question coming from you, Michael. It is about the most frequently asked question I hear, but it usually comes from someone outside the hobby. As patronizing as it may sound, I think most people involved would say, "If you have to ask, you just wouldn't understand."

I recently asked this of someone who was telling me how much he wanted a big block Nova. He said, "I once owned one, and when I opened the hood and saw that big motor...arrrrh!" The noise he made at the end was some sort of Tim Allen grunt. You know if you have to ask....

There are probably plenty of reasons. However, I think most might boil down into two categories. First, people who have a passion for nostalgia. This is where most folks are coming from. They are not usually big collectors, but they have more than one collectable car.

Don Fisher of Fisher Radiators in Mars, PA, said, "I love these cars because they remind me of the sixties and I have fond memories of those times." I have restored several cars that owners bought years ago. Typically, it was the first new car out of college, or they got married and drove off to their honeymoon in it.

Second are the people who have a passion for style, design, or performance. This is the group where you are more likely to find enthusiasts with multiple cars in their collection.



The common denominator is passion. Everyone's passion is individualized. Any hobby is going to cost you time and money. One of the great freedoms in this country is the pursuit of happiness—we all get to set our own priorities. One of the great things about our hobby is, regardless of the kind of cars people favor, it is easy to get along with one another. Considering the cost, you are not likely to find any real lovers of money, only lovers of cars.

Or, we're all sick. We just love things with wheels that go around faster and faster and faster.

M.S: What about investing? Are antique cars a good investment?

B.H: The only advice I've ever given to anyone in that regard is this: "Invest your money in whatever you know best." Compared to the stock market, collectable cars are doing well these days. And there are certainly more dollars buying up collectable cars these last couple of years because of the poor performance of stocks and low interest rates.

The collector car market is reasonably stable with prices rising, unlike the situation in the late 1980s when prices were going through the roof. Then in 1990 they came crashing down when investors got out to go back to Wall Street. As so many people have seen in the stock market, you need to do your homework when investing. For the most part, the people who have made money in collector cars are people who have turned their hobby into a business.

M.S: If I were going to buy a collector car, what would you recommend?

B.H: First and foremost, buy what you like. You may end up "marrying" that car. Chances are good you will spend more on it than you can sell it for.

Second, do your homework. Read, read, read. Learn all you can about the make and model you've chosen. Join a club. If you have not decided what to buy, join AACA. If you have decided, join a more specialized club.

Usually club members know where there are better cars for sale. Sometimes they are not even being advertised.

Third, buy the best you can afford. Any money you "save" at the time of purchase will be quickly consumed by repairs later.

And lastly, don't be shy about getting someone else's opinion before buying that car you simply must have.

M.S: How about some advice on buying a car that should increase in value?

B.H: Remember an Oldsmobile 442 had a 4-barrel carburetor, 4-speed transmission, and 2 doors. There are only a few 4-door cars with good appreciation. Convertibles appreciate well, and so do high-performance models. Any high-performance convertible is a safe bet.

Also, low production numbers are very desirable, but so is market demand. Finally, if you are looking at a high dollar car, expect a high level of originality and the documentation to go with it.

M.S: How does one pick a good restoration shop? And how much does restoration cost? How long does it take?

B.H: Hey, Michael, they are turning out the lights. Let's continue this next week....

Bill Hahn has been restoring automobiles for 25 years. He is in business with Wes Woodward. Their shop is called Hahn & Woodward restoration, located in Harmony, PA. You can reach Bill by email: williamrhahn@msn.com or by calling 412-398-2540. Tell him Michael sent you. **PE**

