

Bob Carroll

On my fifth birthday, my parents gave me two Testors model cars – a 1967 Camaro and a 1963 Avanti. I'm sure they assumed they would keep me busy for quite some time, but in two days they were both completed. That started my love of models of all kinds – cars, ships and airplanes. By the time I was in my mid teens, I had 50+ models in my room and was creating model cars from scrap parts and ships (including a 3 foot long aircraft carrier) from popsicle sticks.

I was always enthralled with all kinds of cars, motorcycles and airplanes, but performance-oriented vehicles have always held a special attraction.

I've always been excited by "sporty" automobiles (actually, just about anything mechanical). Having become "aware" of cars in the mid 1960s, many of my fondest automotive memories are of the cars that were pounding the pavement between 1965 and 1975 - just before I (finally) got that coveted drivers license and my first car.



That first car was a 1968 Mercury Cougar XR-7. It was Forest Green with a black vinyl top, and dark green leather interior. It was motivated by a Ford 302 V8 through a 3-speed C4 automatic transmission. I loved that car! But, my step father (who also loved it) wound up buying a '67 Cougar XR-7 GT. That beast had a 390 V8 and four-speed toploader manual tranny. When he was transferred and had to sell it, I just had to have it. So, I bought it and sold my '68 - something I wish I'd never done. That's when I realized that I had a definite preference for small-block cars. In my opinion, big-blocks weigh down the front end of most cars to the point of hindering handling. I eventually wound up selling that '67 Cougar for parts - long before the Internet and eBay.

Anyway, for those of you who may wonder about my taste and subsequent selection in cars, my experience with my first two rides has caused me to lean towards compact to mid-size sport/pony/muscle cars with lighter powerplants.

While driving that '67 Cougar, a neighbor of mine bought and started to restore an old MGB. I was impressed with the light weight and simple nature of that - and other - British sports cars. Several years later, I came across an in-law who had a '68 Austin Healey Sprite that was in dire need of restoration. That car, (which I still own) has since gone through two restorations - 11 years apart. The last one was completed in November of 2001. I've always done all my own work on cars (excepting transmissions and full paint jobs) and had forgotten how much I enjoyed restoration work. By the way,

when I saw that neighbor 10 years after he started restoring his MGB, he still hadn't finished it!

So, before I finished round two of the Sprite restoration, I picked up a 1969 Corvette. Actually, I was looking for Sprite parts in a local publication and happened upon an ad for a '68 Corvette for "just" \$10,000. "WOW!" I thought. "I can get an old Vette for just ten grand?" So, I went and checked it out and was sorely disappointed. But, I caught the Vette bug. Within a month, I'd found a '69 - which I now believe is the best model year for the C3 Corvette.

Well, while restoring the Vette, I again "stumbled" upon another beauty. This time it was a 2000 Corvette convertible. OK, it may not be a "classic", but it's got to be one of the sexiest late model cars on the road. Besides, I was fed up with my 2000 Mustang GT convertible and thought it would be extremely cool to have **TWO** Corvettes.

OK, I'd taken the bait, now came the hook, line and sinker.

While looking for parts for the Vette (the first one), **I found eBay!** It turned out to be a great source for hard-to-find classic car parts. But, since I was nearly done with the Vette, I started looking at cars. YES! You can actually buy CARS on eBay! That's all it took. It was all over! Since then, I've also bought a '67 Camaro RS convertible, a 1968 Cougar XR-7 (just had to have one again), two (yes two) 1970 Opel GTs, a 1973 TVR 2500M, a 1986 TVR 280i, a 1973 Triumph GT6, and a 1990 Buick Reatta - all over eBay! I've also made "conventional" purchases of a 1969 DeTomaso Mangusta (since sold) and a 1969 Marcos 3000GT.

With so many cars and so little time to restore, maintain and enjoy them, I constantly dreamed about quitting my corporate job and opening a restoration shop. But, I was living in the Los Angeles area and commercial leasing costs made that dream unobtainable. Then an unexpected loss of that 11-year position as a Director of Information Technology forced me to reconsider my options.

So, I did a reverse "Beverly Hillbillies" and packed my bags (and cars) and moved to Texas. Here I was able to take my winnings from the L.A. real estate market and buy a home on nine acres where I could build my dream shop. One year later, that shop is a reality and "Midlife Classics" is now open for business.

In addition to being able to open my dream business, I now have the ultimate justification for attending car shows and participating in multiple car clubs. It's no longer just a way to have fun and share in the joy of classic car ownership, it's also marketing AND it's all deductible! What else could a car nut want?