

Reflections of a middle-aged sport

By WARNER S. LOWE
San Diego Region

The diseased patient reached his crisis in early March. A heavy bundle of that hard-earned green stuff slipped from the patient to the extended hand of the Sales Manager and we were the owners of our second sports car. In any medical report, however, history is most important.

The time—1950; an Eastern University campus. The subject is ill. Diagnosis: new car fever. He had been on the West Coast for a summer without a car (a condition once possible in pioneer times) and he is to return there permanently in the Spring. He is single (a condition once possible in pioneer times). He likes to think of an Oldsmobile convertible. But there's an English instructor on the campus in a strange little car called a "TC" with huge wire wheels that's rather dashing when the top is down. An engineering analysis takes place. The Oldsmobile convertible wins out. Following a trip to car dealer, the financial portion of the analysis is re-evaluated. The Rocket Oldsmobile is now spelled C-h-e-v-r-o-l-e-t.

The time—early 1954; the West Coast: A brand new 1953 TD in MG red is spotted on a lot and driven away for a steal. The sports car bug has scored another victim. What follows is typical: accessories, a car club, rallies, going to the races. The top *must* be down from April to October and we talk of those poor Detroit Irons. But most of all, there's a unique camaraderie. Sports cars are still a rarity. We wave at each other when passing on the road. We seek out other members of the bug-bitten fraternity and talk MG and Healeys and Jaguars and 300SL. Ferraris may invade the Coast one of these days. Torrey Pines is the highlight of the year. Life is pretty fine.

Time passes, the residence changes to a desert locale. Gone are the winding roads and the pleasant weather. Now it's either too hot or too cold. Besides that, it is 35 mi to work one way and the Chevy makes the trip once per week with the car pool. A final attempt ensues. We vacation in the MG and have a ball. San Francisco and California "One" are conquered by our TD. Then it sits in the garage again. One day the dog (115 lb German Shepherd economy model) wanders off. Friend wife departs in the MG to reconnoiter. (The Chevy was on its weekly run with the car pool.) The dog is spotted, bribed, and asked to ride home. He gets in the MG (top down) but alas the final blow: he can only sit facing aft! The disease has subsided. The MG goes on the block and the day comes when we're a 1-car family again.

But the bug (American version) does not lie dormant long. The 1957 Oldsmobile is obviously the ultimate in automobile design. Besides, the family chariot seems to have a whine in the differential. It is January 1957. In August the Chevrolet finally transforms into a Rocket Oldsmobile.

The sports car bug is buried. We're living in the desert still.

September 1958: Goodbye desert home, welcome back California Coast. The Oldsmobile does yeoman service. Occasionally when friend wife puts her foot down, another way of getting to work is necessary. A neighbor obliges. He is the proud owner of a brand new Karmann-Ghia. Once we even drive a Sprite. Time passes, a car pool again dominates transportation. One member drives a Ford but dreams of a Porsche. (Beware the bug!) Several out-of-town trips transpire. During this period much mileage is consumed in a Karmann-Ghia with a Porsche engine, and another modified Karmann-Ghia. Also an occasional ride in a Corvair is followed by a Corvair-Monza. There might be something to this air-cooled engine business after all!

Late 1961: The bug receives reinforcements. Odd working hours, the Oldsmobile is utilized every day in the week, friend wife states: "We need another car!" The die is cast. Rationalization follows. As long as another car is required, why not a sports car again? *The bug has bitten.* Work slacks off, we drive a MGA—not bad, but we've always wanted a Healey. We drive a Triumph. We drive a Healey. Then the *piece de resistance*: we drive a Porsche. An engineering analysis takes place. We check prices of the Austin-Healey versus the Porsche. The decision is reached. Dr. Porsche's machine wins out. The fun is about to begin.

Porsche owner friends recommend the Super. The recommendation sounds reasonable. (Reasonable means \$200.) Then the shopping begins. Surprise: "New Porsches are practically non-existent." A friend speaks of overseas delivery, another of a straight import/export arrangement. Overseas delivery looks attractive; out-of-town dealers are investigated. The local dealer sales force has friends. "A friend of a friend," "Deliveries are behind,"



"Order now and wait," "Some persons wait 6 to 9 months." The order is signed. There is a possibility of a car within a month. The possibility disappears—the Factory is behind. Finally, with the waiting psychology played to the extreme, the car comes in. The color isn't exact, but it's close. The boss says it's just right. A soft "Yes", and we're a 2-car family.

Somewhere along the years the sporty dealer-customer brotherly relationship is lost. In its place hard-nosed automobile agencies; but, the car is as good as advertised. (See *Road & Track*, October 1961). We drive away. It is a new experience. The Porsche is all car. There is something missing though; the novelty of the sports car is gone. There are thousands of them. The friendly hand-waving upon encountering other bug-bitten sports on the road is gone, and with it the grand feeling of belonging. Occasionally Porsches flick lights at Porsches in passing. Somewhat curtailed, the spirit lingers on.

The actual shock comes a bit later. We are working a checkpoint for a 150 car rally. Almost 80% of the drivers and navigators coming by appear to be teenagers. What has happened to us "elder" sports?

But, the new feeling is good. We buy a few accessories, join a club, enter a few activities and take care of our new vehicle. There are no regrets, the car is grand, the price high but the bug (sophomore model) is satisfied!

Use plastic for windshield washer hoses to avoid leaks

The cheap rubber used for windshield washer hoses won't stand up under the solvents and anti-freezes used. Mine let go at the pump and leaked about a pint of water into the cockpit before I found out about it on a long trip.

I replaced the hose with Tygon plastic tubing, $\frac{3}{16}$ in. ID by $\frac{5}{16}$ in. OD. You will want to cut off a portion of the rubber hose on your car to get an exact fit. Ten feet is a safe length to buy. The material is priced exorbitantly at 25¢ a foot, retail. You'll do better if you have a friend in the plastics business.

—PRH

Check steering coupling

Do check the flexible coupling (coupling disk) at bottom of steering column if you are driving a 1957 or earlier car. The older type is of fabric construction, short lived, and if ready to fail, one of these days you will be without steering control. Replace with newer molded rubber type. These couplings are inexpensive and are available at both VW and Porsche dealers. —Art Bartholomee, Chesapeake Region.

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