

Under the Hood, July 2018

Judy and I moved to Redmond in 1973. I was very envious of our next-door neighbor who was driving a 1972 Red C3. Then the first gas crisis came in 1974 and he traded in the Vette for a Datsun 240Z. He soon had wheels and exhaust on the Z car and probably a few other items, but it just didn't have the torque that he liked, so he traded the Z in on a 75 Red C3. Although this era Vette had decent torque, the engine was rather emissions strangled and the base engine that year was rated at only 165 hp. The only optional engine (L82) was rated at 205 hp. According to one source only about 6% of the buyers ordered a L82. Those of you that like their C7 in white, should know that white was also the most popular color in 75. Now that I am talking about my car buff neighbors I will tell you about the family that lived directly across the street. He drove one of the smaller early 70's German built Mercury Capri's, which had been nicely modified. Shortly after we moved in, I could see him in the garage working on the car. I walked over to introduce myself as a fellow gearhead. He politely shook my hand and without pause informed me that did not want to be friends, and to please leave him alone. Needless to say, that is what I did. We had almost no contact for the next year or so, and then one morning we discovered that his family of four had cleared out the house in the middle of the night and disappeared. The house sat empty for at least two years as the bank tried to resolve details. The neighbors all assumed that the gentlemen had been in the witness protection plan and was forced to make a sudden secret move. Then in 1983 we built a house in a small (about 45 homes) neighborhood off Redmond-Woodinville Road overlooking King County's 60 Acre Park. The development was built on a large piece of property and an adjacent home had been granted an easement to drive through the property to reach their home. As the new neighborhood was developed the adjacent home retained the driveway easement that ultimately ran through the yards of two of the new homes. This would later cause huge issues in the neighborhood and with the police, as the home tenant would frequently barrel down the hill on this one lane easement at well over 60 mph next to the two homes. Although the neighborhood streets were private, this home was granted the right to use the neighborhood streets, but he continued to use the easement just to be difficult. When we first moved into our new house, the home tenants were reasonable neighbors. Their daughter, Gina, even sat with our children a couple of times. Gina was fairly young and a "babysitter in training" and her mother, Karen, would usually help out. In the next couple of years, the father became more and more weird (from alcohol and drugs), and his actions more violent and threatening, in addition to obvious drug sales. Multiple calls to the Redmond Police were fruitless, and they would respond that their hands were tied. Things were brought to a head when the up-hill neighbor blocked the easement with logs and the easement holder became rabid. At the time, I was president of the neighborhood HOA, and tried to bring the parties together and resolve the issue. It was not pretty. That man was Henry Hill of mafia fame. His story was chronicled in the book "Wiseguy: Life in a Mafia Family". Martin Scorsese later created the movie "Goodfellas", based upon Hill's life. The Hill family later got tired of our community and moved to Seattle. Henry continued his drug dealing and in the early 1990's he and Karen were expelled from the Witness Protection Program. Henry died a natural, although rather young, death in 2012. I was always amazed that he could be so brazen in the Witness Protection Program and in later years, but he never suffered retribution by the mob. So far in our current neighborhood we aren't aware of any "witness" neighbors. OK, so Hill didn't own a car of merit, but his history was probably similar to my Mercury Capri owner.

Some of you are aware that in addition to a Corvette, our garage also houses a 1967 Sunbeam Tiger. In 1959 Sunbeam introduced the smaller Alpine that was to compete with Triumph and MG, although the Alpine had such niceties as roll-up windows. The original Alpines were powered by a 1.6 liter four cylinder engine. In 1964 the factory also began production of the Sunbeam Tiger which had either a 4.2 or 4.7 liter Ford V8 instead of the four banger. We have been involved in the local Pacific Tiger Club

since 1977. In the latest Tiger club newsletter, I learned that one of our Spokane members acquired a special factory sponsored Alpine race car. In 1961 and 1962, the factory sponsored three Sunbeams in the 12 hours of Sebring race. Sunbeam car #41, was a competitor in 1962. In this era Sebring still had the angled standing start ala Le Mans. In a photo of the start you can see seven C1 Corvettes starting near the front and starting about 19 through 21 are the three green Sunbeam Alpines. I was intrigued by the story and did an internet search of the race results. The grid at Sebring would include full out race cars such as Ferrari 250 TRI (1<sup>st</sup> overall), Chaparral/Chevrolet (finished 6<sup>th</sup>) and multiple classes of slower cars. Racing often has strange results, as the #41 Sunbeam Alpine with only a 1.6 liter engine, finished 15<sup>th</sup> overall (third in Class GT1.6) and ahead of every one of the Corvettes. The best finish for a Corvette in Class GT +4.0, was 18<sup>th</sup> overall, and famed Don Yenko in his Corvette finished 19<sup>th</sup>. I also thought it was interesting that four Pontiac Tempests had been entered in the race, including one to be driven by AJ Foyt, but none of the Tempests started. I suspect Pontiac pulled support of these Tempest's at the last minute. In 1962 most Tempest's were powered by a large 3.2 liter four cylinder that was basically the right cylinder bank of the Pontiac 389 engine. It was no surprise that this could be a very rough running engine. The top performance four cylinder was rated at 155 hp. There were also a very few 62 Tempests that had the Buick built 3.5 liter aluminum V8. I could not find any indication whether the four Tempests were four or eight cylinder powered. The Pontiac Tempest was later a feature in the movie "My Cousin Vinny" when Marisa Tomei is on the witness stand trying to explain why the get away car must have been a Tempest, as it was the only GM compact (at the time) with an independent rear suspension. Back to Sunbeam #41. The current owner is in the process of a complete restoration to racing specifications. The little Sunbeam Alpine that could, proved once again that the race is not over until the checkered flag.

In other racing news, a recent interview with Nigel Mansel of Formula 1 fame had some interesting information. At the age of 40, after Mansel won the 1992 F1 championship, he flew to America and won the 1993 CART Indy Car Championship. He became the only driver to hold both open wheel racing titles at the same time. Although the Indy 500 has gotten some brickbats from the Europeans since it is a modified oval, compared the typical F1 road course, Mansel indicated that the Indy 500 was a course without comparison. In his words "You're averaging around 230 mph, so if you put a foot wrong, the barriers are right there next to you, unlike Formula 1 where you have got the runoffs". In discussing some of the issues facing Formula 1, the most striking message to me was his comment that the current top teams have annual budgets of about \$700 million. Wow. Racing can be so expensive that racers sometimes need additional funds. Four time American Le Mans series champion, and Level 5 Motorsports team owner, Scott Tucker was recently sentenced to almost 17 years in prison for racketeering crimes related to his payday lending business. Obviously, sometimes the source of those extra funds can be questionable.