

Under the Hood, Jan, 2019

Last month, in my column comments about speedometer/odometer errors, I had mentioned that I had blown up the engine in my college car crossing the country heading for my first professional job. This got me to thinking of the engine failures that I have suffered. Some through my own stupidity and some rather random. In the early 1980's a group of guy friends would travel to Portland International Raceway each summer to watch the CART and Trans Am races. One of the guys had a motor home that had been modified with a one-piece aluminum sheet roof. We would put our folding chairs on the top, a cooler of beer, and watch the Portland races from across the creek in the main parking lot. Then in 1987 we decided to take the motor home to Monterey to watch the historic races. Walking the center of the track with all the vendor booths, I found my all-time favorite T-shirt. On the front of the T-shirt was shown an oily mess of broken engine parts with the caption "Honest honey, I wasn't racing". Seems that was at least part of my story. After my engine failure in Nebraska, my car experience was rather uneventful until after I bought our 1967 Sunbeam Tiger in 1976. I was using the Tiger as my daily driver and about a year later I was just cruising along in 4th gear when the engine started to bang and the car literally filled with smoke. I nursed it home and the next day to my trusted mechanic. We concluded the engine was seriously damaged so proceeded to pull and dismantle the engine. We found a broken main bearing cap, and two other main bearing caps were showing crack formation. There was no rational answer why I had the failure at that time as no abuse was happening. However, in the inspection we found one miss-matched piston which indicated the engine had been apart in the past. We figured that engine was toast, so we bought a junk yard 289 and proceeded with a rebuild. The engine needed a 40 over bore, so with the thought that there is no substitute for cubic inches, I said "why not go 60 over and we pick up another couple of cubic inches". That 289 did yeoman duty in the Tiger for quite a few years, although with the 60 over, we always had a bit of an overheating issue. Back to the "new" Tiger engine later. In 1991, I had ordered a Mustang 5.0 and made some modifications for high performance driving events. In addition to rear disc brakes, different gearing etc., we also added a Paxton supercharger running about 5 lbs. of boost. At the time, Paxton was the only aftermarket supercharger that had received CARB certification. This was enough to make the Mustang a great driver and competitive on the HPDE events. We gave this Mustang to our son for his 21st birthday in 96 and ordered a 97 Cobra Mustang. We soon had made some similar modifications, except that this time I went with a top mounted twin screw supercharger putting out 8 lbs. of boost. We drove that car for a year or so, and one thing led to another and I figured that if the car was pretty good at 8 lbs. of boost, it would be 25% better if I changed the pulleys and gave it 10 lbs. of boost. At one driving event at Pacific Raceway, I looked in my mirror for other traffic after I got on the straight. I couldn't see any other cars as I was laying down a mosquito smoke screen. I drove the car off the track and trailered it home and to the shop. Upon tear-down we found one piston burned through the top crown all the way down the side. We also found two bent connecting rods. Now, this era Cobra Mustang had powdered metal rods and I anticipated that the failure mode would have been a literal break in two pieces, but we had just bent two rods. On the Cobra re-build we went with a blower friendly compression ratio, all extreme durable performance parts and built an engine that we thought was bullet proof. I continued to drive the Cobra for a few more years and then sold it to a friend (Brian) in Longview. Brian open-tracked the car, autocrossed and drag raced it extensively. I last saw Brian and the car about 4 years ago at a car meet in Goldendale, and the Cobra was still running strong. About the same time we were playing with the Cobra Mustang, I had decided to put a new engine in the Tiger as I wanted a bit more performance. The 289 that we had installed in about 78 was still running fine, and we put it aside for possible future use. Two Tiger Club friends wanted to build a 65 Mustang fastback (Shelby GT350 clone) vintage racer. They bought a fastback roller and over the next winter I helped put the race car together. Although we knew that my old Tiger 289 wasn't going to be competitive in vintage racing, we dropped that running

engine in the 65 Mustang and got the car running, thinking we would use that engine for the first season while we sorted out the rest of the car. The overheating issue I had in the Tiger was only magnified in vintage racing, so they decided to install a large oil cooler to help. Anyway, the cooler plumbing had some issues, the car ran fine for a short time, but lost oil pressure at a race and it was all over for my old well used 289. By now we have purchased the 2001 Corvette Z06. I was convinced that the Z06 had plenty of power, and my days of modifying the engine were over. Although I left the engine alone, I soon had engine/transmission/differential coolers installed along with other interior safety equipment for track events. At about 15,000 miles, I start hearing a loud rotating noise in the upper engine. We found that the camshaft and roller lifters had failed and several of the cam lobes and rollers were worn down to base metal. I did Corvette Forum search of the failure without finding any issues. GM didn't have an answer, but refused any help as the car had just passed out of warranty and of course the car had a roll bar and other parts installed. So, we put a new cam and set of lifters in the engine and blamed a bad cam. At 28,000 miles, the same thing happened. Even with two identical failures, GM refused to accept that the engine had an oiling issue from the factory. I saw no point in installing another cam and lifters, so we installed a new GM crate engine. To those that might blame my driving style or driving events for the Z06 engine failure, I should emphasize that the car now has about 75,000 miles and the crate engine is running just fine, thank you. By the time we bought our 2015 Corvette, I had concluded that after 20+ years of high performance track events perhaps I should slow down and satisfy my speed lust with autocross. To date, the 2015 Corvette remains bone stock and I hope I can resist the urge to make changes. Hopefully, my engine re-building days are over. The "Honest Honey" T-shirt was faithfully worn for years. I need to find another one.

A private sale of a 1963 Ferrari 250 GTO to an American businessman has been reported at the record high price of \$70 Million. That \$70 Million is not a miss-print, and it is a new record for any automobile sale. You might know that John DeLorean at GM "borrowed" the GTO name for Pontiac's 1964 intermediate Tempest with the large 389 engine. Those of us that cannot afford a Ferrari GTO can always pick up a Pontiac GTO, although even those have become rather expensive. Noted car collector John Staluppi sold much of his collection at the 2018 Barrett- Jackson Palm Beach auction. His pristine 69 Pontiac GTO "Judge" sold for \$178,200. Staluppi's collection was mostly performance-oriented convertibles. Ultimately, he sold 145 cars at this auction. Total proceeds for the entire lot was only a fraction of the cost of the 63 Ferrari 250 GTO. He is not finished with his car hobby, he just felt it was time to sell this old collection and start a new collection. His new collection will be focused on hardtops and wagons. He says he loves the old woodies. Since this is a Corvette newsletter, I should add that although Staluppi sold a bunch of Corvettes, he did not sell his first new car purchase. He was the original owner of a 62 Corvette, that he later sold, only to find it years later and buy it back. He says that although his collection focus is changing, he will not sell the 62 Vette. It is not only the 250 GTO that has become so expensive. My favorite "old" Ferrari is the 275 GTB/2 of the mid- 1960s. In a recent "Autoweek" issue, there was a reprint of 1973 classified ad for a 1965 275 GTB/2 in excellent condition, 45,000 miles for the grand sum of \$7,250 (approx \$41,000 today). That car will bring 7 figures today. Even better, the Ferrari had a factory tape deck. The same "Autoweek" column featured a 1958 classified for a Mercedes 300 SL for only \$6,600. Our challenge is to determine the next great collectable vehicle that has huge price appreciation potential, buy 10 of them, and hold them for long term gain. What is holding you back?