

Under the Hood, May 2019

Last year at an English auction a 1957 BMW 507 was sold for almost \$5,000,000, twice the “going rate” for this model. In the years immediately following WWII, BMW was trying to re-establish itself as a motorcycle and auto manufacturer. They were encouraged by an American importer to produce a performance two-seat roadster, and the 507 was born. This model produced from 1956-59 was rather exotic for the day and powered by a 3.2 liter aluminum V8. BMW hoped to produce 5,000 per year. Manufacturing costs escalated, resulting in ever higher selling prices, which simply reduced demand. Towards the end of production, the price was \$10,500, a huge amount of money in 1959. Although the 507 was popular with celebrities including John Derek and Elvis Presley (Elvis owned two), it was a commercial failure as only 252 vehicles were produced. So why did this 507 sell for such a high price? As Paul Harvey would say here is the “Rest of the Story”. In 1956, British rider John Surtees rode a MV Augusta to the 500cc motorcycle world championship. As a token of appreciation, Count Augusta presented Surtees with a check to purchase a BMW 507. Surtees used the BMW as his daily driver and went on to win three more 500cc motorcycle World Championships. Surtees then switched to Formula One. When he signed on as a driver with the Ferrari Team, Enzo Ferrari supposedly told him he could not be seen in a BMW, and the 507 was returned to his home garage for the duration of his Ferrari career. Surtees won the Formula One World Championship in 1964, and later went on to start a race team, and had some success in Formula 5000 and Formula 2. The 1957 BMW 507 remained a one-owner car until John Surtees’ death. Surtees is still the only person that has won a world championship on both two and four wheels. I suspect the ownership provenance contributed greatly to the hammer price.

Are car subscription services the next alternative to leasing? In various forms, many of the major manufacturers are now offering car subscriptions. One major difference from leasing is that most subscription packages are all-inclusive and include insurance and maintenance. You pay your monthly fee, add fuel and drive away. Some packages are closely related to leasing. For instance, Volvo will offer you a compact SUV for \$600/month with a two-year commitment. At the other end of the commitment are programs that BMW, Porsche and Mercedes offer. For \$1,399/month you can drive a BMW 4 series, 5 series, X5 or M2. You are allowed up to 2,000 miles/month and can switch cars at any time. You can also opt out of the program on a month’s notice. For \$2,699/month BMW will let you drive a M4 convertible, M5 or M6 convertible. In Washington we need to add at least 10% tax to those monthly fees. Which means I can subscribe to drive the BMW M models for only about \$36,000/year. Seems like a bargain to me.

I finally viewed my first Bentley Bentayga on the road. Bentley offers this rather large SUV at a starting price of \$232,800. It is claimed to be the fastest SUV available and is powered by a 600 hp, 12 cylinder engine. A fair number of those horses are probably necessary to power the 1950 watt, 22 speaker audio system. If you have the extra cash, you can order the optional Mulliner Tourbillon by Breitling diamond studded mechanical clock for the dash. This option is priced at \$168,100. I spotted the Bentayga parked on Old Main in Bellevue. It was already dark, so I was a bit afraid to get too close to the car to determine if the owner had ordered the dash clock. OK, just call me jealous. Thinking of dash clocks. When I bought my Sunbeam Tiger, it had a block off plate where the clock would go in the dash. In the first restoration of the car, I wanted to add the optional electric clock. I found a source of NOS (new old stock) original clocks and called to place an order. The seller informed me that the clocks were guaranteed for 1 second. Thinking he meant that the clocks were guaranteed to be that accurate, I

questioned further. In explanation, the seller told me that if I wired up the clock, the warranty was 1 second, and don't bother calling to complain. I bought and installed the clock, but never wired it to power. I set the hands and it still reads the same as I set it years ago. Have you ever noticed that in almost every single watch or clock advertisement the time is set at 10:10. Apparently, someone did research years ago and determined that this time setting shows off the device better than any other setting.

We Corvette fans can be very passionate about our choice of rides. However, we are not alone in our passion. In an official Porsche publication, I read that the first two Porsche clubs were founded 65 years ago with a total of 13 members. Currently, there are now 675 official Porsche clubs with over 200,000 members. That is an average of 300 members/club. Perhaps they are not all active, but this is an amazing number. If you include all the Mustang, Camaro, Mopar, rod clubs, lowriders etc, it is easy to see that there are millions of people currently involved with car clubs.