



Reader's Rides Studebakers Remain Family Tradition

Editor's Note: "Reader's Rides" features classic cars that remind us of the good old days. If you have a car you've loved back to life, or photos of the treasure you should have never sold, send us your story and we'd love to share it.

Mike Hill, Precision Rebuilders, St. Clair, Mo.

"The Fleet"

ERE: So tell us about "The Fleet"—your wife's pet name for your car collection.

Hill: The first car I remember my parents having was a 1953 Studebaker

Commander. Somehow, that must have had a profound effect on me, as I now own three different Studebakers of similar vintage: a 1955 Commander with a 392 Chrysler Hemi, a '54 Conestoga Tudor wagon with a Cadillac Northstar engine, and a 1953 Champion Tudor coupe.

ERE: So can you name a favorite, or is that akin to comparing your children?

Hill: While they are all near and dear to my heart, the 1953 Champion Tudor coupe makes it skip a beat. I have owned this car for over 35 years, and it belonged to my father, Jack, prior to that. My father began building it as a drag racer to compete in the old AHRA (American Hot Rod Association) in the

Modified Production class in 1963. I still have the 1964 rulebook that we got when we went to a meeting in some guy's barn in the winter of '63.

The car was given to him by his brother, who had stripped it for parts that he needed for his daily driver. My dad built and installed a '57 392 hemi with an automatic transmission and an Old's rear end. The car then sat as he raised his family and grew the business he started in '61, Precision Rebuilders, for which I am responsible today. Both of these obligations consumed all his time and money, so the race car sat.

ERE: So how did you end up with it?

Hill: During those idle years, my

friends and I drove thousands of miles in that car without ever leaving the garage. My dad realized that this was a project that he would never get back to and decided to get rid of the car. I was devastated and begged him to reconsider. In 1971, on my 15th birthday, my dream came true...the car was mine.

Over the next several years, with the help of my father, I learned how to weld, shape metal, build engines, and whatever else I could soak in. I drove it on the street for several years until it had progressed to a point that it was no longer streetable, and the neighbors started complaining about what time I came home, since it was by then per-

haps a little (or a lot) louder than an acceptable limit.

ERE: So how did it turn out after all that welding, shaping and building?

Hill: The car is now powered by an aluminum version of the old Chrysler Hemi, manufactured by Donovan Engineering. I run a 6-71 high helix supercharger with an old Hilborn four port injector, and all the goodies it takes to keep an engine like this together. I shift it through a torqueflite transmission, to a nine-inch Strange thirdmember with 4:10 gears.

The original Studebaker frame made

way for a rectangular tube chassis with a 12 point roll cage and a strut front suspension. The body is all steel with exception of the hood. The top has been chopped three and a half inches in the back and four and a half inches in the front. The fins are from a '57 Hawk (also a Studebaker) because I figured you can't fly without wings. And while it may not actually fly, it does cover a quarter mile in 8.42 seconds at 165 mph.

Hopefully this answers all your questions. I will be away from the shop for the next few days—racing the car.

