



Cadillac & LaSalle Club Potomac Region Caddie Chronicle June 2009



***STONEWALL CADILLAC TURNS 40
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TALIANO AND THE STONEWALL VETERANS ASSOCIATION***



**The Stonewall Cadillac leading the New York City Gay Pride Parade
June 2003**

Photo courtesy of the STONEWALL Veterans' Association (SVA)

On Friday, June 27, 1969 at about 1 a.m., a routine-harassment-of-Gays police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a club in New York City known for its Gay clientele, touched off the not-so-routine Stonewall Rebellion, a series of demonstrations that are frequently cited as the start of the Gay Rights movement in the United States and around the world. A 1969 Cadillac de Ville convertible had been parked with its top down, as usual, on the same block of the Stonewall Inn on Christopher Street -- only a stone's throw from the club's entrance -- by its owner Williamson Henderson. It was spared any damage in the chaos that followed. Once the rebellion was over, Henderson, who was at the forefront of the rebellion, was arrested and had his car impounded. The Cadillac was driven (not towed, as many think) by two plainclothes NYPD police officers to the old Sixth Precinct on Charles Street near the Hudson River in Greenwich Village. Despite the civil unrest, the car did not suffer any damage. In reality, there were no insurance claims filed by anyone for anything -- not even a car scratch.

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Two days later, the car was released back to Williamson Henderson, who regularly drove it down the full length of Christopher Street from Greenwich Avenue to West Street (West Side Highway) at the Hudson River in Greenwich Village, New York. Many Gay and other people would yell out – as they still do today – “The Stonewall Car”! Over the years, the Cadillac has become pretty much a parade car, getting plenty of duty in the annual NYC Gay Pride parade and other events.

In the mid-1980s, this Cadillac led a parade in NYC sponsored by GM of over 50 Cadillacs when the new-sized Coupe and Sedan de Villes were introduced. In 1994, the “Stonewall Car” led the “Spirit of Stonewall March” from the legendary Stonewall Club in Greenwich Village through some narrow streets passing the historic Washington Square Arch, with the huge Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in the distant background, all the way up Fifth Avenue with cheering spectators, into Central Park. This famous car led hundreds of thousands of Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual & Transgender (GLBT) people and their friends and supporters into the park, where hundreds of thousands had already congregated in anticipation of the biggest GLBT rally in history. Have you ever brought your car to be part of an event with a real million people? The “Stonewall Car” was the only car in the entire Central Park that glorious day, along with about 1.1 million people.

Here are some very interesting facts regarding the 1969 de Ville convertible. GM described this Cadillac as its “crown jewel”. Right they were! Its weight is over 4,600 pounds (nearly 2 1/2 tons!); its length is 225 inches (nearly 19 feet long!); its width is 80 inches (over 6 1/2 feet wide); its height is 55 inches (with convertible top up); its wheelbase (the distance between axles) is 130 inches; and its massive, powerful, fuel-efficient, 375 horsepower, V-8 engine is 472 cubic inches at 4,400 rpm (revolutions per minute). It is one of the largest V-8 engines ever produced to power a passenger car! The Cadillac has the great standard-equipped power steering, power brakes, six-way power bench seat, power windows, AM/FM stereo radio, power radio antenna and, most importantly, power convertible top. The convertible top is made of white, triple-woven padded canvas with a real glass rear window. One option the car has which is rarely used is the automatic climate control system. When is the top up? Never! Not even in winter! The car is kept with the top down year-round and a custom canvas cover over it. The seating areas are white sierra ostrich-grain leather. The flooring is midnight black pile carpeting. The dashboard, door panels and rear seating area side panels have inlaid, designer grain wood. The entire “Stonewall Car” interior is original! The custom Vogue tires are extra-wide whitewalls. The wheel covers are solid chrome spokes. The fuel tank capacity is a whopping 26 gallons (plus one gallon reserve). The locked gas cap is hidden behind the rear license plate (“STONEWALL”).

Over 16,000 of these classic Cadillac convertible cars -- a very large number for a luxury convertible -- were produced by General Motors Corporation with Body by Fisher. The huge chrome bumpers and massive front with cast aluminum “egg-crate” grille was used as a design model for Cadillac grilles for the following two-plus decades into the 1990s. The car introduced the innovative and safety-conscious wrap around cornering lights (now found, though less grandly, on almost every car). 1969 was the year that front seat headrests (restraints) became mandatory by law. Seatbelts were now required to have a push-button open/close mechanism. The 1969 Cadillac marked the public-wanted return of the dual horizontal headlights (after four years of the vertical, un-Cadillac, 'stacked' headlamps).



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In 1959, back-tracking a decade, Cadillac had the incredibly unique, "bullet" tail-lights. Ten years later, it seems that they made a point to have the 1969 tail lamps be unique. 1969 was the only year that the Cadillac had the distinctive "lantern" tail-lights. They complemented and were built-in to the slowly sweeping, modified tail fin. In fact, virtually the only major difference between the 1969 and the 1970 Cadillacs (same body, same size, same stats, etc.) were the tail-lights. The 1970 returned to the well-known, long, vertical tail-lights.



**Williamson Henderson with the "Stonewall Car"
Summer 2001
Photo by NYPD Sergeant / GOAL Officer
Tommy T. Jeans**

The 1969 and 1970 Cadillacs (98% identical twins) were widely described as "muscle cars with tuxedos". It is most appropriate that the 1969 is both distinctive and 'different'. The ad slogan for the 1969 Cadillac was: "The pleasure of driving the only luxury convertible built in America!" Four decades later, that horn slogan still blows true -- and with even greater significance in America's auto industry.

The most frequently asked question about the "Stonewall Car" is: "What is the mileage?" At the turn of the millennium (2000), the "SW-Car" had an original mileage of 94,169 on New Year's Day. The mileage was only 94,894 original miles three years later as of January 1, 2003, actually

regarded as a very low figure considering the vehicular age. At 35 years, as of April 1, 2004, the mileage was only 94,954. In June 2005, the odometer read a low 95,169. Three years later, at the end of June 2008, the mileage read a mere 95,233 miles. Currently, the odometer shows 95,269. In the last decade only about 1,000 miles have been added to this restricted-mileage "historical" vehicle. The engine is original and has had absolutely nothing overhauled. It even has the original glass window cleaner bottle and mount adjacent to the engine!

The "Stonewall Car", now owned by the STONEWALL Veterans' Association (SVA), has appeared in several movies, television commercials, print ads and photo shoots. It was used in the popular promotional poster for both the premiere of "Stonewall: The Play" in 1994 and "Stonewall" (the movie) in 1996. Since the "Stonewall Car" had a professional exterior restoration in mid-1999, SVA members voted unanimously to again make the car available (after a 20-year hiatus) to be 'leased' -- with SVA supervision -- for films, commercials, print ads, editorials and videos. It also gets plenty of duty in the annual NYC Gay Pride parades and other events, especially this year, as the car turns 40, the Stonewall Rebellion marks its 40th anniversary and the 40th annual parade is held on Sunday, June 28, 2009, led by the 1969 Cadillac. To read more about the "Stonewall Car", visit www.STONEWALLvets.org.