

GRANDMOM'S CADILLAC FUELS FOND MEMORIES

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Michele Hauf was a toddler in 1963 when her grandparents drove their 1955 Cadillac to North Charles Street in Baltimore where Chesapeake Cadillac was located. The time had come for a new Cadillac, but the ones on display wouldn't do. A 1963 Series 62 Cadillac briar rose two-door hardtop was ordered with an ebony black painted top. That combination had to be special ordered since Cadillac officially frowned on two-tone paint schemes.



Besides having the usual Cadillac amenities, the car was ordered with no air conditioner and no power windows. In lieu of air conditioning, Soft-Ray tinted glass was ordered along with a basic AM radio and rubber floor mats for the front only. It was an unusual Cadillac; however, the Chesapeake Cadillac salesman, Stanley W. DeMoss, adhered to "the customer is always right" rule and ordered the car.

He called the anxious buyers when the car was delivered and told them to bring \$5,473.06 and get their Cadillac. The date was May 30, 1963. Ida Bertsch, Mrs. Hauf's grandmother, paid for the 4,505-pound Cadillac and drove off to show it to her son, Bob Brillon. He, of course, was happy for her since he was going to buy her old Cadillac.

The 1963 Cadillac became more than just a car and assumed some of Mrs. Bertsch's personality. "As far as grandmom was concerned, there was no car better than her Cadillac," Mrs. Hauf says emphatically. When Mrs. Hauf's grandmother retired soon after she purchased the car, she and her husband traveled extensively in the Cadillac, a car that was perfect for gobbling up long stretches of highway. The 1963-model, 390-cubic-inch V-8 engine producing 325 horsepower received its first major revision in 14 years. The power output remained unchanged, but a lighter, stronger crankshaft was new as well as an engine block that was stiffer while shedding 50 pounds. At superhighway speeds the car is virtually silent.

The realization that an 18-foot, 7-inch-long Cadillac can accelerate from 0-to-60 in 10 seconds makes one think fact has merged with fiction. The truth is undeniable and, additionally, the 120-mph speedometer isn't just there for the sake of appearance. While Mrs. Bertsch owned the Cadillac it was garaged, even though the overhead garage door wouldn't close completely.

Mr. Brillon received the 1963 Cadillac upon his mother's death in 1986 and took it home to Pasadena. He didn't have a garage, so for seven years the Cadillac endured whatever nature had to offer. Mr. Brillon's daughter, Mrs. Hauf, did not take kindly to that kind of treatment to her grandmother's car. Mrs. Hauf remembered all the trips she had taken in the car and could almost hear her grandmother's exhortation to "drive defensively." She was always asking her father what measures he was taking to preserve the car. "I got tired of hearing it," Mr. Brillon says, so in 1993 he gave the car to his daughter in Baltimore. She had already seen some minor damage to the left front fender and had removed the entire fender for repair. "I drove the car home without a fender," Mrs. Hauf recalls. "I was just happy to get grandmom's car." Her husband, Daryl, with no knowledge of the family history, humored his wife. He didn't know how seriously she was taking this project.

The first order of business was getting a cover for the car. Next, Mrs. Hauf tackled the interior. Since her grandmother had always garaged the car, the interior was in very good condition. Still, she replaced the sandalwood carpeting with an exact duplicate. The expansive dashboard was well-preserved as was the vinyl part of the seats. Matching fabric was located and was installed in both the front and rear seats.

While this work was being done, Mrs. Hauf was in the car almost daily, cleaning, scrubbing and polishing all the brightwork to bring it back to its original luster. In her few free moments she was slowly moving the typical garage clutter from one side of the family's two-car garage.

When Mr. Hauf saw the splendid results of the interior work, he agreed to partition the garage to keep dust and clutter away from the Cadillac. Mrs. Hauf's grandmother had the Cadillac repainted and touched up several times over the years and the surface was beginning to show its history. Mrs. Hauf decided to do the job correctly and began searching for a shop that could and would do the job right. She searched and shopped for such a shop for about two years before she located TLK's auto body shop in Brooklyn.

The shop agreed to take the car down to bare metal, fix whatever needed fixing and repaint the Cadillac like it was in 1963. After all the brightwork was removed from the car, it was delivered to the shop in the autumn of 1997. During the 18 months the car was in the shop for repainting, most of the chrome parts were sent off for replating. Mrs. Hauf became well-acquainted with the stainless steel parts as she spent countless hours in her basement polishing the parts to their original luster. She remembers the grille was the worst. Several series of soaking and scrubbing were required before she could begin polishing.

All the pieces of the puzzle came together in March 1999. The car was painted, the interior was done, and all that was left was to reinstall all the brightwork. To speed things along, Mrs. Hauf and her father decided to tackle that task. "I figured it would take about three days," Mr. Brillon says. Three weeks later and dozen of trips to the hardware store for various fasteners, the car was done. Mrs. Hauf drove it around town to show the car to all her relatives and, of course, they all remembered her "grandmom" in the car. "It glides down the road," Mrs. Hauf says. "It doesn't feel fast but it is."



A lot of gasoline has to flow through the four-barrel carburetor for the long car to begin rolling. It rides on a 129.5-inch wheelbase and Mrs. Hauf reports mileage in the 12 to 14 mpg range. As the Cadillac approaches 124,000 miles, Mr. Brillon reports the heads have never been off the engine and as far as he knows, the only serious repair was the starter. Now that Mrs. Hauf's project is completed, she enjoys taking sunny-day cruises in her grandmom's Cadillac. "I never go for a drive without thinking of her," Mrs. Hauf says.