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Classic Car Show features massive 'Land Yachts' that focus on 'smiles per gallon'

By Alison Burns



Bea Haase with her Lincoln Mk IV Continental Cartier edition Photo Sora O'Doherty

mostly used on high days and holidays and cosseted in the garage the rest of the time.

One problem with a 50-year-old vehicle is locating a mechanic who understands autos that pre-date the computer, but Haase has found herself a highly skilled "Lincoln Whisperer," whose own Lincoln carries license plates that wittily read "Mary Todd."

Haase is not a tall woman but she handles this behemoth with great panache. She misses the cup holders and charging ports that come standard on 21st century vehicles but laughs to think that the amenities we now take for granted weren't even on the horizon 50 years ago when her parents purchased their brand new "Black Widow." What the car does have aplenty, though, are redundant ashtrays at every seat. Who knew that drivers would ever demand coffee-on-the-go, or that smoking might prove so unwholesome?

Haase's mom and dad always thought they would be passing their elegant automobile onto one of their grandchildren but they could never have anticipated the rocketing cost of gasoline or the trend toward smaller cars. ?And so it has come to Haase. ?

"My dad would be so pleased that I love it," she says, "and take good care of it."

Also at this year's car show, Phil Toy will be highlighting a true Land Yacht: the white 1959 Cadillac Convertible, Series 62, that he's owned for over 40 years. At 19.5 feet long, it features power seats, power steering and still has its original paint.

After a five-decade career as a professional photographer working on car collections, Toy is no stranger to auto shows, so he must have found it hard to choose between his eight vintage cars - five Cadillacs, two Eldorados and one Nash Metro - when it came to "showing up and showing off" at the event.

Perhaps he's not quite in Jay Leno's class (the TV host owns over 180 autos and 160 motorcycles) but Toy likes to say, "Jay makes me feel normal."

Toy had an excellent mechanic for many years but after he passed on, Toy decided to work on the car himself, which he finds both satisfactory and rewarding. He says that working out the finer points of "reverse engineering" keeps him young.

He uses the same theory on his fleet of vehicles, his mantra being "use it or lose it," and so he drives each of his cars for a week or so before moving onto the next one, which keeps everything humming.

Toy doesn't worry about gas gauges or mpg: he checks on the gas by opening the cap and shaking the car to hear "how much splash is in the tank."

"All I know," he says, "is that it gives me smiles per gallon on premium, which is all I need."

It's time to "show up and show off" - which is how the invitation to Orinda's Classic Car Show was worded when vintage car owners were invited to display their cherished vehicles at Orinda's upcoming 19th Annual Classic Car Show, at and around Orinda Motors from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 9.

And who could resist, especially when this year's theme is Land Yachts - those outrageously massive vessels with their huge engines, cushy interiors and enough torque to captain a 3-speed transmission, so prized back when gas averaged 30 cents a gallon.

One such car is Bea Haase's treasured Mk IV Continental Cartier edition.

The car, bought for \$7,900 in 1972 by Haase's father, who promptly named it "the Black Widow," still has less than 50,000 miles on the clock. That's because it was



Phil Toy with his white 1959 Cadillac Convertible, Series 62 Photo Sora O'Doherty

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[back](#)

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