

How I Came to Own A Studebaker

By: Steve Tournay

I haven't the faintest why, by age 4 or so, I was completely crazy for cars. We weren't any more of a "car family" than anyone else in Hamilton, Ontario, might have been; my dad preferred Pontiacs (and still does), but cars, to everybody but me, were just transportation...I, however, craning to see through the windows of the '63 Strato-Chief, knew—and very much cared--what everything else going by on the road was.

I was also to develop a bent for history. Eventually I'd learn that there was actually a car company based in Hamilton...albeit Studebaker had quit the car business when I was nine months old. Dad had liked the Avanti..."it was ahead of its time". My maternal granddad owned at least two Studes; Mom had been driven to her wedding in a Starlight coupe ...but, well, Dad preferred Pontiacs, so we never had a Stude.

I got interested in airplanes, too, after a cousin, studying at McMaster University, came to live with us in the 70s; Don had his pilot's licence...which was the acme of cool! In a roundabout way this was what brought me back round to cars...and Studebakers. Don would take family members flying from Mt.Hope Airport south of Hamilton, and it transpired that there was an aviation museum on the field. Fast-forward a bit and I'm working at Canadian Warplane Heritage as a tour guide...and meeting Studebaker people. Several CWH members (for example, Gene Madjanovich, and eventual Hamilton SDC president Paul Cronkwright) were also in SDC, and the Studefolk would often visit the museum in groups. One of my fondest memories from

tour-guiding at CWH was an impromptu all-Studebaker cruise-in on the tarmac outside one of the museum hangars. These cars were cool! And I began to want one. Scratching that itch would take nearly a quarter century...

Fast forward again to 2007, and my dear old '97 Plymouth Neon. It was having transmission trouble. My mechanic swiftly found the crux of the problem: an automatic transaxle doesn't work very well without fluid. There'd been a very minor leak over a long period. I had driven to and from Ottawa twice, as things turned out, with a dry tyranny! Mechanic refilled the transmission and wished me luck. The car was right as rain. And there's me, with a paid for Neon that I suddenly did not have to replace. Onto the Internet went I, Googling "Studebaker for sale"...if I didn't have to buy a new car after all, why not buy a really old one instead, as I'd wanted to for some twenty years?

Found some interesting Studes in spring '07: a smart 1950 Champion in Brockville; a white '66 in Mississauga; a startling-looking hot-pink '63 Lark four-door (with Chev 305) in Nova Scotia; a complete but ratty '55 Champion right in east Hamilton. And a satisfyingly-plain, sea-blue 1962 Lark VI Deluxe two-door in someplace called Everett, Ontario. Drove up to have a look at that one. Did a lot of smiling...this could be the one for me! The '62 had issues, to be sure; but they all seemed minor: a sticky hood latch, a trunk that popped neatly open whenever one closed the driver's door with any gusto. Glitches. But a solid old

car, and just presentable enough...I wanted something I could simply have fun with, not a glistening show car.

The owner, Chris, was a guy perhaps half my age who had seen this Lark at cruises and was intrigued by the make...he'd not heard of a "Studebaker" before. The previous owner passed away, and this young chap acquired the Lark from the family. He'd never had the car plated in the months he owned it, but it was still quite driveable; he'd pattered round the neighbourhood in it occasionally, plates or no. I dithered briefly, and then bought the car.

Certifying the Lark and changing the ownership took longer than expected, and I ended up having the car trucked down to Hamilton for the certification work rather than doing it in Everett and driving it home. (As events later unfolded, that was a good call.)

The certification was completed, and Historic plates (about a sixth the cost of regular plates) went on the car, on November 30, 2007. December 1 was a bright but frigid day and one I will not soon forget...driving a Studebaker all over Hamilton for the first time. A stop at the old Stude plant was an absolute must: my Lark had been assembled in that plant in May of 1962, and the big STUDEBAKER lettering was still legible on the plant's north wall; besides, I'd promised Chris I'd email him a shot of his car with the factory in the background.

My Lark "honeymoon" went great...but lasted only that one day. I'd already arranged storage at a barn in Glanbrook, and as it was already December, I chose to drive the Lark up there that evening. A wise move. While I was gingerly maneuvering the car into place in the barn, it began to snow: the first of several big winter storms that would clout the Hamilton area in 2007-08.



Mom arrives in style at her wedding in 1958 in Grandpa's Studebaker

This photo of Mom and Grandpa arriving at the church for Mom's 1958 wedding is the only one I have that shows the Studebaker Grandpa owned for a while. It appears to be a Champion Starlight coupe from the period 1947-52; Mom thinks it had the iconic bullet nose, which would make it either a 50 or a 51...sure wish it were still around.

Evidently Grandpa had more than one Studebaker through the years. Here's a recently rediscovered snapshot of Mom at 21 with a four-door, dark-coloured Studebaker. Unlike the car involved in my parents' wedding two years later, enough of this one can be seen to identify it as a 1949 Champion 4-door sedan. The car in the wedding is a two-door Exner-bodied car (47-52) painted a much lighter colour (Mom thinks the other car was a bulletnose, ie. 50-51, and that it was tan)...So now we know Grandpa had at least two Studes...wish at least one were still around!



At my brother's wedding in 1999

Since my Mom had been driven to her 1958 wedding in a Studebaker, we decided to find one to use when my brother got married 41 years later. The one we found was this beautiful 1959 Silver Hawk...which would have been a brand new car just out when Mom and Dad tied the knot in '58!



Aunt Ruth arrives at her wedding Oct 56 in a Stude

Get a load of that door panel...better still, Aunt Ruth thinks the seats, too, were leopard. Oh to find this car today!