

Corvettes star at Huntington Beach show

Benefit for city library features restored cars and rare new models

By G. Chambers Williams III
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HUNTINGTON BEACH — Don Pearson's 1937 Ford "Woody" station wagon is the quintessential mid-20th-century beach vehicle, the kind the Beach Boys would have driven.

Pearson's Woody even has valid 1937 California license plates. But when Pearson, 46, of Huntington Beach found the car six years ago in a barn in Maryland, it never had been close to the sands of the West Coast.

It was in pieces. Its doors, hood and other parts were stacked nearby, and it hadn't been driven for years. Pearson bought it and had it shipped to California. When he got home, he began putting it back together.

But Sunday, it was a crowd favorite at the Fifth Annual Concours d'Elegance Auto Show at Huntington Beach's Central Park, an event whose proceeds will benefit the city's main library.

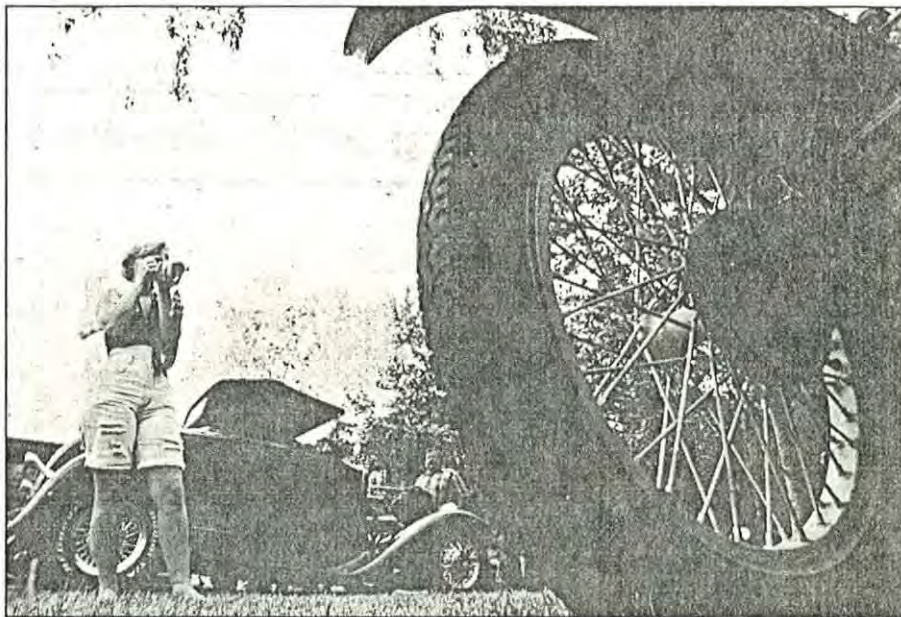
"This car hasn't been restored," Pearson said. "We put it back together and got it running, and we revarnished the wood. But it's all original — even the paint."

"When I bought it, it had only 37,000 miles on it. It was originally purchased in Washington, DC, by a family that had a summer home on Cape Cod, and they kept it garaged up there. They only used it during the summer when they went to the Cape."

Nearby was Pearson's other pride and joy — a fully restored 1954 Buick Skylark convertible. The gleaming red car — with red and white leather seats and wide-whitewall tires — looked showroom new. It is worth well more than \$100,000, Pearson said.

Pearson's cars were among hundreds on display at the show, including a 1913 Ford Model T Speedster, a Ferrari Testarossa, a Lamborghini Countach and a limited-edition 1990 Corvette ZR1, which at \$60,000 is the most expensive production car built in the United States.

Corvette, the Chevrolet sports car that made its debut in 1953, was the feature car of this year's Con-



Jennifer Hakell of Cypress photographs a Ford Model T at the Fifth Annual Concours d'Elegance on Sunday. Ana Venegas/The Orange County Register



Jeff Specher of Mission Viejo views a 1952 Corvette at a Huntington Beach car show Sunday.

cours d'Elegance, and there were more than 100 on display — including at least one from every year of production.

Lisa Israel, 28, of Huntington Beach was showing off her 1963 Corvette Sting Ray hardtop — the one with the split rear window. She and her husband, Chip, bought the car nearly two years ago, "mostly as an investment," she said. The cream-color car hasn't been re-

stored, but it's still in almost-new condition.

"I really like this one because of the split rear window," she said. The car was built the year after she was born.

"We don't drive this one very much because it is so valuable," she said. "But I have a 1970 model that I drive to work every day. These cars are really a lot of fun to drive."

Israel said she and her husband don't plan to spend the thousands of dollars that some car collectors do to restore their cars to like-new condition.

"We like to drive them, so we'd never spend that kind of money on them," she said. "Some of these people spend so much money on paint jobs that they wouldn't dare drive their cars."

"But we want to drive them. That's what cars are for."

Bob Wood, 41, of Huntington Beach began his hobby of restoring Corvettes in 1983, with the purchase of a white 1964 convertible. It took him four years to complete, and it was one of three Sting Rays he had on display in Sunday's show.

The other two were a 1965 convertible and a 1967 coupe. The dark green '65 model was purchased in pieces in March 1989, but now looks brand new. The blue coupe, which also looks nearly new, hasn't been redone. "Everything's original on it, including the paint and the interior," he said.

Wood has a 1971 model at home that is undergoing restoration. He said he spends most of his evenings and weekends working on his Corvettes — or showing them off at Corvette events such as the Concours d'Elegance.

"Like a lot of people my age, I fell in love with these cars when I was a kid," said Wood, a member of the Southern California branch of the National Corvette Restorers Association. "When I was growing up, this was always my dream car, and I said then that someday I would own one."

Wood's wife, Madelon, also is a Corvette aficionado, she said. In fact, she drives the blue 1967 coupe regularly.

"This is THE American sports car," she said. "There is an air of romance about them."

