

Cars

Circa 1947: Traveling west in Roswell, NM, in the backseat floorboard, I remember hearing parents talking about the alien spacecraft crash nearby. Vaguely curious, but the talk from grownups made it seem unlikely. The car had a split windshield and was dark colored.

Circa 1950: A long new Nash Ambassador arrived in the driveway of Walnut St home. It had four doors, two-tone green paint, six straight cylinder block, and a four-on-the-post gear shift with overdrive. The interior was massive. Front seats could be laid back on supports that were extracted beneath the back seats. A full double bed was created. There were four radio speakers, two in the front and two in the back. The AM radio had a fade knob to spread the sound to both front and back. That was new technology! The transmission would drop into overdrive at each forward gear level. Rev it up in 1st, 2nd, or 3rd, let up on the accelerator and the gears would fall into the next high level. In later years, I tried explaining to the officer that I could do 70mph in 2nd gear.

The family drove this upside-down bathtub across Death Valley at night to get to Anaheim in 1954 to visit relatives and Disneyland. We used a 'hang on the window' swamp tube with water to stay cooler inside.

In high school, circa 1960-61, I was given the Nash in exchange for another. The Nash provided a great vehicle for fun trips to the drive-ins. Finally in 1963, after many trips to Las Cruces from Roswell, the pin on the crankshaft broke and I sold it. The next day, the guy who bought it drove it back to me, and told me there was a little screw that allowed the removal of the crankshaft, and he had replaced the pin. Oh Well.

Circa 1959-60: I saved and bought a 1951 Ford 4-door with a straight eight and three-on-the-post transmission. I used it for transportation to work and dating for about a year and a half. For some dumb reason, my friends and I decided it would look cool to drop it in the front. We cut off the front springs about a coil and a half.

Part 2 - Episodes and Memories

Yes, it was lower in the front, but we had no idea that the tie-rods and steering equipment needed to be adjusted as well. The wheels on the front were 'splayed', narrow at the top and wider at the bottom. It wobbled like crazy and was dangerous to drive. Father was not impressed. He took it away from me, gave me the Nash, and very carefully drove the Ford to Alamogordo to his brother's garage to get rid of it. Glad he made it through the Ruidoso/Mescalero reservation mountains. Lesson learned.

Circa 1963-65: Living in married student housing in WWII barracks and after selling the Nash, I bought a brand new, 1963 VW beetle for \$1,601. It weighed 1,601 lbs. It was great to have a new car. I managed to pay for it with wages received from the three part-time \$1.00 per hour campus jobs. The trips to fish at Caballo Lake Dam on the Rio Grande were inexpensive during the summer of '63. The divorce happened in 1964. The car payments were too much. I traded my equity for a 1954 Chevrolet. That car was hardly driven. I stayed on campus most of the time and started dating my next wife who had a 1954 Ford on campus. The Chevrolet was sold and I hitched rides with J.A., my fiancé.

Circa 1965-66: J.A.'s little brother came to college, and he received the Ford. We married and bought a 1958 two-door BelAir Chevy Impala. What a tank! The first thing to fail was the power steering. I went to the parts yard, stripped off a manual steering box, and replaced the power box. That made it drivable although a little more muscle was needed.

Circa 1967. Tiring of the tank with the heavy steering, I bought another brand new 1967 VW beetle. Wife was not happy because I had not talked to her about it. I thought guys bought cars...not gals.

Circa 1968: After receiving the MA degree, plans were made to move from Las Cruces to some place wetter and to work on a Ph.D. (Austin). I traded in the bug for a VW van. Hitching up a 10 ft trailer, we started out through El Paso, up the Guadalupe pass, and barely made it to Austin before the clutch burned out. The van lasted until about Jan 1969 when it was 'creamed', back and front, at an intersection in NW Austin. Time for another Beetle. Again, the wife was not consulted and was not happy.

Part 2 - Episodes and Memories

Circa 1972: A real sports car. 1972 pumpkin-colored, Chevelle SS 2-door hardtop. Good looking car, but the 350 cu-in engine would not stay in tune. We drove it to Washington State and pushed it to 110 mph in Montana. J.A. driving it at night in 1974 from the San Antonio College class where she taught computer system language (JCL), and was hit from behind by a semi on IH 35. She saw an accident ahead and an approaching, jack-knifing semi-trailer behind at the top of the hill. She pulled over quickly and ran down the embankment before the crash. Her only complaint was, "There was no port-a-potty".

After that, a menage of vehicles, some good and some poor, entered my life.

1980 Ford Granada (poor),
1978 Chevy 2-door pickup with camper (average),
1982 Audi Fox station wagon {really a VW},
1957 Chevy 2-door BelAir, (dream car)
1987 Toyota Tercel (we named the key mobile),
and then a series of Jeeps (one was t-boned and flipped) and Nissan SUVs.

Now I have an EV... an electric golf cart, and three walkers; one for the front yard, one for the back yard, and one in-house walker to get to the bathroom.