

RED RAGTOPS RULE, ALONG WITH ONE GOLDEN MERCURY

Story and photos by Randall Bohl



Attending the Goodguys Southwest Nationals and calling it work may sound absurd, but there is a hard part to it—choosing the car or cars to feature in a story. With a rumored 1,600 mostly beautiful (or if not beautiful, at least unique) vehicles on site at WestWorld in north Scottsdale, this is the challenge.

At first, this year looked like that of the 1956 pickup truck, as we were quickly drawn to examples from both Ford and Chevrolet. But that was not to be, as next entering was a big red boat of a 1950-something convertible, top-down gorgeous, minus a hubcap and rearview mirror. So there absolutely had to be something to hunt down on the polo field, had to be a story there.

After meandering through the swap meet area and almost every row of cars on the field, we spotted another big red and chrome convertible. But this one had all the pieces, as it's the **1949 Cadillac** owned by Earl Bumpass of Scottsdale, well worth a longer look and a chat.

We'd call this puppy a sleeper, hidden under its stock body and behind those white walls. Underneath, the Caddy has Art Morrison rear suspension (ladder bars/coil over), a 500-cubic-inch motor out of a 1976 Cadillac hooked to a Turbo 400 transmission, and a 9-inch Ford rear end. Creature comforts include air conditioning, power windows, 1982 Cadillac 6-way leather power seats and a tilt wheel. Drop spindles in the front carry 17-inch Cadillac wire wheels, while the rear has 18-inch Cadillac wires.

About a row over, we found the object of our search, a **1954 Pontiac Star Chief** owned by Ted and Robin Shaffer of Phoenix. Ted and Robin seemed to be out walking the show themselves, but a



couple of passersby happened to know a lot about 1954 Pontiacs—such as that this was the last year for the straight-8 engine. And this particular car must be rare, because it has stock air conditioning. Interesting. We would find Ted and Robin later, absolutely.

The morning had passed and it was

KEEP RIGHT >>



Earl Bumpass of Scottsdale, with family and friends and his red 1949 Cadillac convertible.





time for the concession stand and an icy cold Coke. While we were headed in that direction, Pat Neve introduced himself, asking what magazine we're with. It turns out Pat would be thrilled to have his **1951 Mercury** included in our pages. This wouldn't exactly fit into our apparent bent for big red convertibles, but it is one sweet custom lead sled.

Pat purchased the Mercury about eight months ago, after first having purchased a '51 for his son—who had so much fun with his, Pat decided to buy one for himself. This car is from Pennsylvania, where in 2009 it took 1st Place "Coolest Custom" at the Goodguys show in Pocono. Since then, it has won "Best Interior" at Motorama 2012 and "Most Outstanding Paint" at Motorama 2013 in Harrisburg. The car has a GM ZZ3 crate motor hooked to a Turbo 350 transmission and 10-bolt Positraction rear end, with disk brakes front and drum rear.

Originally a "rust free" California car, the Merc' was chopped three inches, with all moldings removed and smoothed, and the gas tank filler removed and installed in the trunk. Door handles were shaved, and the doors and trunk operate on remote. Paint is by Glazarath, with custom artwork deep in its pearlescent layers. The interior is all leather and all custom (well there is some 1998 Lincoln in it), with power seats, rear seat recliner, tilt wheel, remote stereo in the trunk and a backup camera. The whole thing is crowned by Pat's "KING51" license plate, complete with a twin cobra snake frame.

Glancing across the field, we noted that Ted and Robin were back with their Pontiac, and the sun had faded in the west enough to take some more photos—as well as ask a whole lot of questions about their Star Chief.

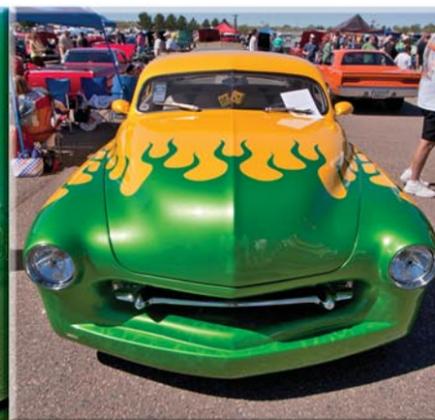


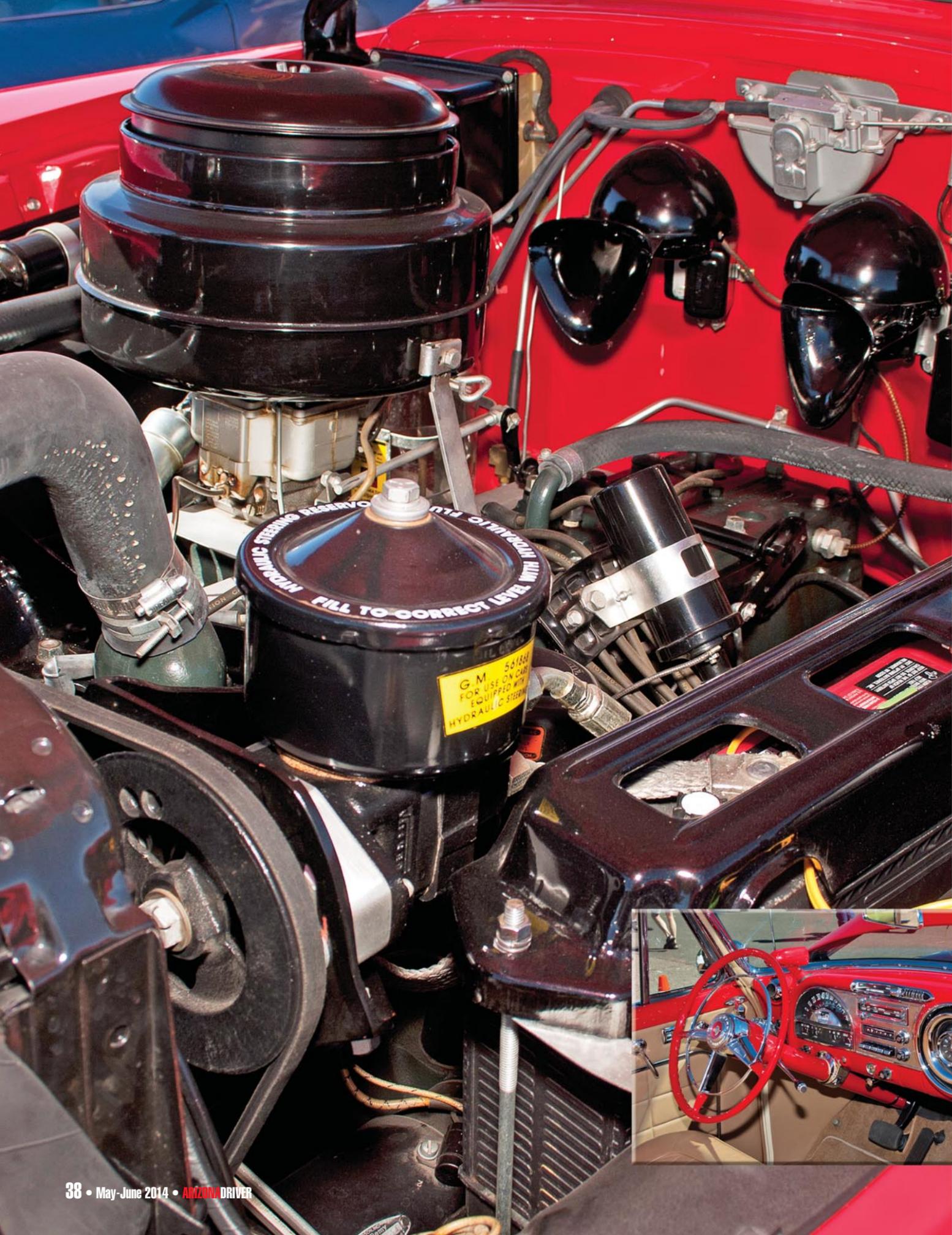
Ted says they bought the car from Benrich Auto Recyclers in Phoenix. That was owned by the Petty brothers, who race Dodge and Mopar and didn't want the Pontiac—so they sold him this and another parts car, in 1996. This is Ted's first restoration.

The car is loaded, with power every-



Pat Neve of Glendale AZ and granddaughter Gia show off their '51 Mercury lead sled coupe.





thing—steering, brakes, windows—plus an automatic transmission and straight-8 engine, 1954 being the last production year for this motor. The Pontiac also has GM's early oncoming traffic high/low headlight beam sensor, and indeed it is one of *only three* Star Chief convertibles produced with air conditioning. In fact, shortly after Ted had purchased the car, Harrison Radiator and Air Conditioning contacted him, offering to purchase the car "as is" to restore for a mobile museum they were putting together.

When we first saw it, part of this car's appeal to us was its slightly unfinished look as it first pulled in to the show.

Ted pointed out the original 6-volt spotlight on the driver's-side door, explaining that he has another original yet to install on the passenger side. Original emblems being nearly impossible to find, he has created his own for the hood, trunk and wire wheel centers—or for one wheel, anyway, which will actually become plural when he has finished the other three, as he explains they are difficult. "You can't get your fingers underneath the spokes, to polish the dish on the back side of it," he says.

A passerby had earlier told us there should be an Indian head on the hubcap emblem, but Ted had done his homework. When questioned on this, Ted said, "No, not in 1954. The '52s and '53s had Indian heads—gold one year and silver another—but the '54s did not." The Chief Pontiac hood ornament is original, and it lights up at night—very nice.

When he was looking for a project car at first, Ted didn't intend to buy the Pontiac. He had wanted something with more chrome. In retrospect, though, he says "holycow, if this had more chrome and stainless, I couldn't afford to do this



project. It's everywhere!"

Ted has come to know every chrome shop in the Phoenix area over the years. At one point, he said he had taken about six years off from working on the car, prior to the interior installation. Once the interior went in, and he was able to drive the car for the first time, he regretted that time off, as he says the car is just so much fun to drive. ■



Ted and Robin Shaffer of Phoenix, presenting their 1954 Pontiac Star Chief convertible.

