

AB | AUTOMOBLOG

THE COLLECTOR CAR HOBBY

IT'S AFFORDABLE, AND IT'S ACCESSIBLE
BY RICHARD REINA

FORWARD

Cars are meant to be enjoyed and driven, and you should take every opportunity to do just that with yours. That is the overarching theme of this e-book written by Richard Reina, Product Training Director for CARiD.com, and Automoblog's resident expert on the classic and collector car market. I think this e-book from Richard is coming along at precisely the right time.

We have spent the majority of 2020 in quarantine. The events we usually look forward to every year were cancelled. Summer came and went for the first time without those idyllic Main Street car shows. The rallies and the cruise nights, and all the meet-ups we put on our calendar didn't come to fruition this year.

The silver lining here for car enthusiasts is how much more enjoyable road trips have become. Even a casual drive is reason enough to celebrate as the line between our homes and offices slowly disappears. It's that love of driving that inspired us to publish this short but comprehensive e-book.

No matter how long you have been waiting to get your dream car, this e-book will help. Richard will share insights on where to look, what to look for, and, most importantly, what to do after you bring your "new" older car home. When it comes to this topic, there is nobody better than Richard. When it comes to that car life, Richard has lived it. Here's to hoping this e-book encourages you to do the same.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carl Anthony". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Carl Anthony
Managing Editor, Automoblog
Detroit, Michigan



CHAPTER I

**YOU WANT A CLASSIC CAR, BUT YOU DON'T KNOW
MUCH ABOUT THEM. HOW DO YOU START?**

Think you can't afford to enter the collector car hobby? In fact, it's very affordable; doing some initial research and staying open-minded can put a drivable dream car in your garage within your budget. Follow our four key steps, which comprise the four chapters of this book, and you will eventually find a world of new friends with whom you can share your automotive passion.

The collector car hobby has seen explosive growth in the United States in the last few decades. In addition to traditional car shows, the hobby has spawned cruise nights, tours, rallies, and parades. Auction companies specializing in classic cars stream their events live to large audiences. Books and magazines on the subject are supplemented by a plethora of online articles, videos, forums, and classifieds. Hobby participants find that collector-car events provide lots of camaraderie in a family-friendly atmosphere. The delight of piloting a shiny classic, whether on a Sunday ice cream run or a week-long rally, has supplanted other leisure activities.

The overarching theme centers around America's lengthy love affair with the automobile. Almost everyone owns and drives a car; we all have grown up with cars (and trucks) in the family. Whether it's school, jobs, romances, or vacations, many of our life stories revolve around a car. Nostalgia tugs at us and ignites a desire to recapture a part of our past. You don't need to be a car expert to experience those emotions! Those watching the hobby from the sidelines feel the attraction pulling at them. If you've been itching to join the action, you may be overwhelmed at the thought of researching, finding, and purchasing a collectible classic. Start with the presumption that there's a car out there that grabs your interest. It could be like the one you had in high school, or the one you wanted but couldn't afford 20 or 30 years ago, or the one your grandparents had that you remember from childhood.

Forget any practical matters related to ownership (for now) and ask yourself, "what do I find appealing about the classic car hobby?" It almost always comes down to a memory of a car you had, a family member had, or a car you wish you had. Picture such a vehicle in your driveway. Would you cruise around the neighborhood, or join a weekend tour? Must it be a two-seat sports car, or would you be just as pleased with a station wagon like a favorite uncle had? Are you mechanically handy enough to tackle something 50 years old, or would you insist on something with modern comfort and convenience features? Allow yourself to daydream, if just for a moment, to help you focus on the right reasons to enter this new world.

Chapter one begins accordingly with Rule Number One. If you start here, finding and purchasing a collectible classic will be much more rewarding. When looking to make a first (or any) purchase of a drivable classic, the Number One Rule is to buy what

interests you within your budget. There have been too many cases of someone buying an old car for the wrong reasons, including:

- **Your buddy said he'd help you fix it up**
- **Your neighbor was selling it for cheap**
- **Someone told you these cars go up in value**

Instances like these quickly turn into buyer's remorse when the hulk you've towed home doesn't run, your buddy lacks the expertise to get it running, or you discover you overpaid and can't resell it at any price. Education and research are vital steps to take before opening your pocketbook.

The Number One Rule includes the phrase "within your budget." If you had pined for a '60s Shelby Mustang when they were new and want one today, understand their values are well north of six figures. If you conclude from this that you've been priced out of the hobby, think again. There are dozens, if not hundreds of decent, drivable collector cars that can be purchased for less than the cheapest new car. Establish your budget, and be prepared to shop for vehicles within it.

With that number in mind, put aside 10 to 20 percent for initial maintenance and upkeep. This adjustment is necessary whether you're shopping in the four-figure or seven-figure price range. Any used car needs money for registration, tags, and insurance – and there are usually some immediate needs, even if it's just fluids and hoses. For example, if your initial budget is \$20,000, bank 15 percent of that, leaving a net figure of \$17,000.

If you were set on that 1968 Shelby Mustang, unfortunately, \$17,000 isn't going to land one. Is there a solution? There is, and it's called being open-minded. The '68 Shelby shared its body shell with all 1968 Mustangs, and Ford built about 300,000 of them. (The '67 model is 95 percent similar.) While working on this book, a quick web search turned up several '67 and '68 Mustangs priced in the mid-teens. Being open to alternatives gets you a car with the looks you desire, at a fraction of the price.

This open-mindedness allows you to broaden the search in numerous ways. Consider the so-called orphan cars, manufactured by companies no longer in business. Makes like American Motors and Studebaker built some interesting vehicles in their day. Less popular than Chevrolets and Fords when new, that holds true today, making them more affordable for those willing to follow that path. Aching for a Camaro that doesn't quite fit your budget? The American Motors AMX pony car sells at a 15 percent discount compared to the Chevy.



This 1955 Packard 2-door hardtop (left), spotted at a recent car show, was for sale at an asking price of \$17,900. Conversely, the 1954 Packard 4-door sedan (right), a less desirable body style but in all-original condition, sold recently at auction for \$7,000.

Shopping for less-popular body styles and powertrains also brings you into bargain pricing. While coupes and convertibles are at the top of the value heap, many of these models were also offered as sedans and station wagons. If the fantasy is a 1962 Chrysler 300 coupe, the four-door sedan version will likely be about half that, leaving you more money for any unexpected expenses that may pop up. If American muscle is the end goal but out of reach, investigate the same body style with a smaller engine. The '64 Pontiac GTO and '64 Pontiac LeMans look identical from 20 paces; LeMans prices tend to run \$10,000 to \$20,000 less.

Education about your new hobby is essential, especially if you want to make every dollar count. Read everything you can and consider joining a local car club. Most clubs do not require ownership of a classic to join. There are national clubs that encompass all makes and models, and plenty of marque-specific clubs. Befriend some like-minded people, which you can also do at a local cruise night or Cars & Coffee event. Having their insights and help will be beneficial as you are searching for your dream car.

Then it's time to draw up your shortlist of cars that you'd consider for your first collectible and begin shopping!



CHAPTER II

**OLD CARS ARE ADVERTISED FOR SALE
EVERYWHERE. WHERE SHOULD I LOOK?**

The thrill of the hunt can be more exciting than the find, and indeed, some car collectors relish the entire search experience (and you should too). But where should you start looking? Ignore anyone who insists there is only one place to find such a car, and start your search from the widest vantage point possible. When you consider all the places where collector cars might be found for sale, that list includes classified ads, outdoor locales, and auctions.

For the first-time buyer of a collector car, online classifieds serve multiple purposes. They provide you with a snapshot of available cars, educate you regarding condition and pricing, and establish a potential supply based on a given travel radius. But I cannot emphasize this enough: avoid purchasing a car sight-unseen (it's risky even for those with experience doing it). You want to see, touch, and drive any prospective classic, whether it's a block away or an entire state away. For classifieds, start with some national sites. Two of the better-known ones are eBay Motors and Hemmings. Narrow your searches based on price range, model years, and zip codes. Other popular sites which you can segment by locale include Craigslist and Facebook Marketplace.

If you live in an area with a number of used car lots, you may find one that specializes in older cars. Some dealers keep newer cars on the front line, and the older ones in the back. You might even take a weekend cruise and see if any neighbors have placed an old classic on the front lawn with a For Sale sign. Local flea markets, swap meets, and cruise nights sometimes include exciting cars for sale. Cars found this way have the advantage of being relatively local and allow you to lay eyes on the vehicle easily.

Auctions are exciting; they're fast-paced, action-packed, and adrenaline-pumping. If you've watched them on TV, you may have seen some sales that looked like bargains, and indeed, there are good deals to be had. However, for the novice, I recommended gaining some experience first. Auction cars cannot be test-driven, yet a test-drive is something I recommend to all first-time buyers. Furthermore, the circus-like atmosphere has been known to cause even the more experienced buyers to raise their paddles based on emotion, not reason. Leave the auction scene (for now) to those who have had some practice with it. Instead, stick with a potential pool of vehicles garnered from classified ads or other sources that allow you time to look everything over before making a purchase.

Have you decided on a particular car yet? Here is an overview of classic and collectible cars segmented by time period:

- Pre-war (before World War II) cars are what you might think of when you hear "antique car." Quaint yet crude, these can be a good value as demand, and therefore prices, are low. Parts availability and service knowledge may be difficult to come by. Modern traffic limits most of these to low-speed local driving. The iconic Ford Model A roadster is perhaps the best-known of the pre-war cars.
- Post-war through baby boomer period cars were built roughly from 1949 to 1967. Mechanically simple, they're easy to maintain, and most are reliable for a long drive. They lack the safety and comfort features we expect in our new cars, and rust is a big concern. Watch out for poorly-restored ones. The 1957 Chevy Bel Air epitomizes this generation of cars, as do the muscle cars of the 1960s.
- 1968 saw the start of safety and emission controls, and began the malaise period, extending into the early '80s. Seat belts and safety glass keep you safer, while primitive emissions devices reduce horsepower and fuel economy. It wasn't all doom and gloom, as European and Asian imports sold in greater numbers. Two such cars, the Porsche 911 and the Datsun 240Z, are very collectible today.
- The early '80s was the dawn of the new performance era. Improved electronics allowed engines to burn cleaner and make more power, and the V8 came roaring back. Even the left-for-dead convertible returned. Many vehicles include climate control, cruise control, and power everything. Ford's evergreen Mustang, on its Fox body platform, was one of the best-known cars of the decade.
- Vehicles from the late 1990s on up may not yet be considered collectible as most are not yet 25 years old (which some car clubs require for inclusion). Yet '90s era cars like the Mazda Miata, Toyota Supra, and BMW M3 are being acquired by today's younger collectors. Cars this new have airbags, advanced electronics, and top-notch reliability. If you want your toy car to drive like a newer car, then by all means, shop for something in this timeframe.



This '62 Corvair was for sale, parked along the road; think open-mindedness! Private owners might have repair history and be open to test drives and negotiation.

Whether you're searching online or in your local community, don't become frustrated if you cannot find cars to your liking at first. Get in the habit of making frequent repeat searches, which can give you a jump on any vehicles that recently hit the market. When something does come along, you will most likely be purchasing from either a dealer or a private individual, and there are pros and cons to each.

A private seller, as the owner, should have a clear title in their name. Ask how long they have owned it, and if they have service and repair records. It's a significant advantage if they have receipts showing regular upkeep. A potential downside would be an owner failing to disclose a known issue. There's no warranty when buying from an individual. You should be able to test drive the car, and their asking price should be in line with the market (and will likely be negotiable).

A dealer typically starts their asking price somewhat above the market. There may be a legitimate reason for that if any reconditioning has been done (oil change, new tires, or new brakes, for example). They should be able to provide such documentation if so. Ask if there's any additional warranty the dealer offers.

The dealer should have a transferable title. In many locales, a dealer can take care of title and registration paperwork for you (but also beware that some charge for this). Ask for a test drive, and if the dealer declines, walk away.

Even after my years of experience, I bring a friend when checking out a car, to have a second set of eyes (and a voice of reason). You should too. Bring someone knowledgeable about old cars, or lacking that, anyone with whom you can confer. Aside from the usual things you would look for on a used vehicle, older cars should be inspected for rust and signs of poor repairs performed because of corrosion or collision. Check serial numbers, VIN tags, and other identification, especially if the owner claims that the car is a valuable model. During the test drive, the car should drive well, but be aware that steering and brakes on an older car won't be as precise as a modern vehicle. Finally, don't feel pressured to purchase the first car you see! It can be very helpful to look at numerous vehicles, even if one gets sold before you can make a second visit to it.



This 1988 Alfa Romeo Spider sold at auction for \$7,000; good deal? Perhaps; but this sign was the only info provided. Buyer beware!

CHAPTER III

I JUST BOUGHT MY DREAM COLLECTOR CAR.
HOW DO I GET IT HOME?



You found it! Congratulations! It's time to remain clear-eyed and level-headed, and think about logistics. In other words, how do you plan to get your new toy home? How far away is it, 20 miles or 200 miles? Is it in a drivable condition? If it is drivable, do you trust that it will make the trip without incident? Or do you intend to have it trailered? Remember that whichever choice you make, you will incur some additional expenses.

Let's review the driving option. The vehicle needs to be legal, meaning title in your name, tags attached to the car, and insurance coverage in place. Before you add this car onto your existing auto insurance policy, consider collector car insurance. These specialized insurance firms offer reduced rates based on the greater care and more limited use the typical collector car receives.

For example, I have a 1967 Alfa Romeo, which is always garaged and driven only about 2,000 miles a year. My collector car policy includes full liability, comprehensive (collision), and roadside assistance, all for about \$350 a year. It's best to look into this before you make the actual purchase.

Next, you'll need a ride to where the car is, and that entails a spouse, relative, or friend to provide that lift. Some collectors fly out to the vehicle's location and embrace the long-distance purchase as an excuse for a road trip. That can certainly provide a lifetime of memories (hopefully all good ones). If you go that route, do everything possible to ensure the car will survive the journey. Bring a buddy, and bring your cell phone, roadside assistance membership, and credit card!

If the car is simply too far away, or you are unsure of its roadworthiness, you can hire a transport company to haul it for you. My recommendation is to use a company which specializes in older cars. Companies that haul all different kinds of used vehicles may not treat your classic with the care it deserves. A possibly less expensive choice is to rent or borrow a trailer, presuming you have access to a vehicle that can tow such a load. This could be a major time investment, depending on how far away the new purchase is located. Remember that while the tags can wait, insurance should not. Obtain insurance coverage as soon as you legally own the car, whether it's in your physical possession or not.

Some of the transport methods I employed in my youth were not the wisest. When I bought my first collector car, I removed plates from an existing car, bolted them to the new purchase, then drove home without proper tags or insurance. This is not recommended! During another youthful adventure, I borrowed a truck and trailer and made two eight-hour round trips to bring home several cars and a load of spare parts. While the rig I borrowed was free, I neglected to include costs for fuel, food, and lodging in my calculations. When I added up those numbers, I realized it would have been less expensive to hire a transport company.

As an older and wiser collector, I've learned to do things the proper way. A few years back, I bought an old Mustang from a private seller and first got plates and insurance in my name. A relative gave me a ride to the seller's house, where I bolted my legal plates to the car, and drove home with no issues. My most recent classic car purchase was about four hours away. As part of the negotiations, the seller and I agreed to split the transport company's fee 50/50, which was more than fair. The car arrived safely inside a covered trailer



Cars on open carriers are exposed to the elements. Some shippers combine old and new cars on the same truck. An enclosed carrier, used by many specialty haulers, protects the vehicle from the weather.

To sum up: determine if the car can be driven back, and if you want to drive it back, based on condition, distance, and your own time and effort. If so, obtain tags and insurance first. Arrange for your own transportation to the car's location, and take all necessary precautions to ensure your safe and reliable return. If you're not driving it back, arrange for transport, either by hiring a trucking company or by using a trailer. Get insurance on your new toy as soon as possible.

Whether driven or trucked, you should have the garage space prepped. You DO have garage space for it, yes? Your new baby deserves secure, covered storage. Sweep and clean your garage beforehand so you can properly welcome your "new classic" home. It's also a good idea to measure your garage bay to ensure it will fit. You don't want to tow your new ride home only to discover it will have to sit out in the driveway with the elements.

If your initial plans are to perform work on the car, whether that entails repairs or upgrades, you can start to line up replacement parts, tools, supplies, and workshop manuals for it. Depending on the depth of the project, make sure that there is enough room in the garage to spread things out. This is why, as I said a moment ago, it's so important to clear out your garage. I've taken cars apart only to learn the hard way that a disassembled car takes up twice the room as an assembled one. Since this is your first collector car, I'm hoping that any planned disassembly is partial, minor, and temporary.

If you intend to take the car for a longer drive, like on a tour or a rally, you can get a head start by procuring generic necessities such as tools, breakdown items (fire extinguisher, reflectors, battery jumpers), and emergency supplies.

As excited as you may be to start driving, any car which is new to you deserves a thorough once-over. This is especially true for an older classic you just bought. So the next step in the adventure will be performing initial checks and service work to allow you to drive the car as you intend. Take comfort in the fact that once those steps are completed, you'll be ready to join the cruise night, tour, or rally of your choice.



A collector car deserves its own dedicated garage space; a cover provides an additional layer of protection.



CHAPTER IV

**HOW SOON CAN I START DRIVING MY NEW TOY IN
CLASSIC CAR EVENTS?**

You've got your "new" old car safe and sound and tucked away in your garage. Let's begin under the hood - do you know how to open it? The previous owner may have included an owner's manual and/or service manual with your purchase. If not, start making a "needs" list and add these manuals to it. With the hood open, you should recognize some items which are common to almost every vehicle built within the last 60 years.

Fluid levels, including engine oil, automatic transmission fluid, power steering fluid, brake fluid, radiator coolant, and washer fluid, should all be checked. Most of these have either dipsticks or caps which provide access. And remember, safety first! The engine should be off and cool to the touch for these checks (auto transmission fluid is usually checked warm and with the engine at idle). Top up as necessary, which means having the correct fluids on hand. Make a note of any which are abnormally low; you may need to check for leaks.

Next, inspect all critical rubber parts, including hoses and belts. Hose checks must include radiator, heater, and overflow tank hoses, including clamps. Accessory drive belts for the alternator, power steering pump, water pump, cooling fan, and A/C compressor should be checked for cracks, frayed spots, and tension. If there are vacuum hoses, check those too. Battery terminals should be clean and tight. If not, clean with baking soda, and protect them with a coat of petroleum jelly.



Any dirt, rust, or corrosion on the battery terminals must be cleaned. Ensure terminal clamps are tight.

Move to all exterior lighting. Turn on the low beam headlights, then high beams. (For many older cars, outside lights will operate with the key off). Walk around the car and check running and side marker lights, then all four turn signal lights. For the brake lights, ask someone to depress the brake pedal while you stand in the rear. Exterior lighting is critical; replace any bulbs which are out.

Check all five tires, including the spare, for pressure, tread depth, and sidewall cracks. If possible, verify the date codes on the tires – the tire industry recommends against driving on tires that are more than 10 years old. Check that all doors open fully and latch closed securely, and that door locks work (we do not want you to lose a passenger). Extend all seat belts from their spools and see that they correctly buckle. Whether manual or power, door windows should be tested to ensure they move down and fully back up. Don't forget the vent windows, if equipped.



A tire pressure gauge is the least expensive tool you can purchase. Buy one and use it regularly.

If you are unsure how to perform these checks, this is your chance to learn! One advantage of older cars is how they can be less complicated and easier to maintain than newer cars. Read your service manual, plus look online for helpful videos. If you know someone more knowledgeable who would be willing to help, invite that person over to guide you. You can also pay a professional to perform these checks for you, but the costs add up quickly. There are times when you may need to see a professional, however. For example, a lift will be needed to properly inspect the brakes, exhaust, and other underbody components.

Remember what we discussed in chapter one: make room in your budget for any unforeseen repairs (10 to 20 percent). This will help you cover the cost of taking your car to a shop, or it will allow you to give a little extra cash to that new friend you made at the local car club who is coming over after work to help. As anxious as you are to start driving, it's critical that the car be as safe and reliable as you can make it. Once you've addressed any shortcomings (topping up the oil level may take 10 minutes, but new tires may take several days), you're ready to hit the road.

Have you ever driven a car with drum brakes? Or with an 80-horsepower engine? Or with a manual choke, or with a stick shift transmission? Your old car may look beautiful, but it drives very differently than your current vehicle. The goal of the initial drive is to familiarize yourself with an unfamiliar car, so it should be brief, local, and with little other traffic. Learn how differently this old car operates compared to your daily driver. As you gain confidence, you can venture farther out. It's also best to carry a flashlight, a fire extinguisher and, depending on your skill level, some spare parts and a small tool kit.

During the "hunting phase," your intended use of the car was part of the criteria when selecting a model. At one extreme, many hobbyists put very few miles on their toys and drive them only to local cruise nights and cars-and-coffee events. Reliability is less of a concern here. The car is parked and displayed, giving the owner a chance to chat it up with interested attendees, and family members can readily join in the fun. Given the rising popularity across the country of these static displays, this is a perfectly reasonable way to immerse oneself in the old car hobby.

A middle-of-the-road choice is the group tour, usually sponsored by a local club. The tour could be a single day or might consume a weekend. Your classic needs to be reliable enough to be driven between 50 and several hundred miles. Your comfort is a factor too. Cars with cramped cockpits and lacking creature comforts like air conditioning and power steering can be downright uncomfortable for touring. A later model classic from the 1980s or even the '90s can be a wonderful tour car. Tours also allow you to see the sights and spend longer periods of time with like-minded enthusiasts.

At the other extreme are full-scale rallies, which differ from cruise nights and tours. The typical classic car rally is a four- or five-day long event, encompassing 1,000 miles or more of driving. The event itself may be so far from home that you need to have your vehicle shipped to the starting point. Each day's drive is held rain or shine, and the driving is "spirited," to say the least! Your collector car needs to be more than reliable; you need a handle on hot- and cold-weather starting, oil consumption, high-speed

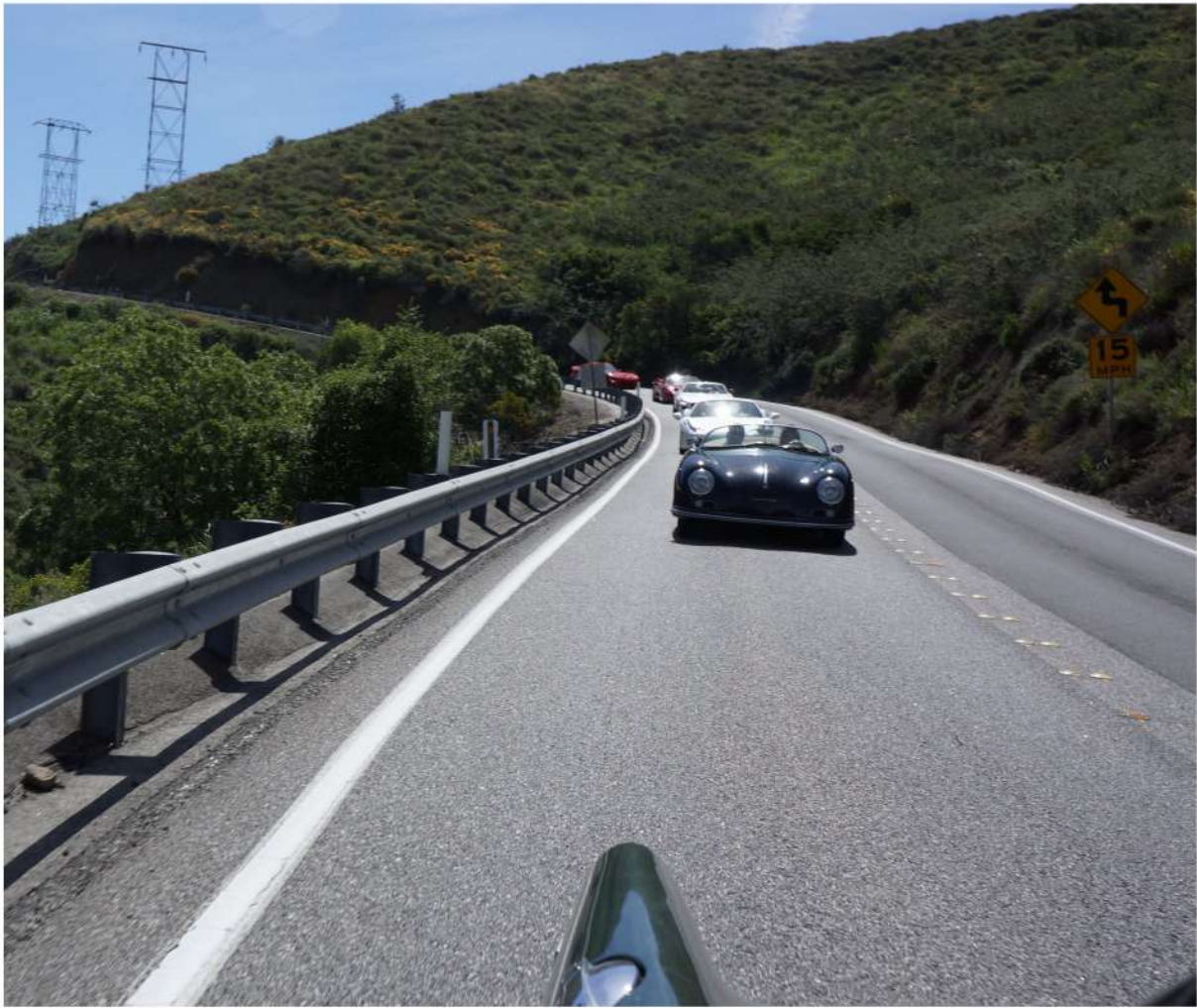
braking, wiper effectiveness, and so on. Be ready for a more thorough course of preparedness, which could take weeks.

I've done all three kinds of events. Cruise nights are great if you care less about driving and more about meeting friends, both old and new. Tours are a low-key way to spend time in an old car with a spouse or friend, exploring new areas without any time pressures.



Car shows are a great way to meet like-minded people and show off your new ride.

Rallies are an all-out immersion. The experience of aggressively driving your sports car for 250 miles a day over four days requires focus and attention. Sharing the day's meals with your fellow rallyists keeps you in the spirit of the event all week, so don't be afraid to dive right in after you get your classic car in its best condition. When I have the time, it's hands down my favorite kind of classic automotive event.



A thrilling way to enjoy your classic sports car is by joining a rally along twisty two-lane roads.

You've come to the end of this book on making your first foray into the classic car hobby. Here's hoping that it inspired you to consider joining the fun. When you do make that purchase, don't treat the car like a statue. Cars were meant to be driven and enjoyed, and at the end of the day, that's what you should do with yours. **Good luck!**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard has been an auto enthusiast since the age of two when his dad taught him the difference between a Chevy and a Ford. After a childhood spent building car models while his siblings watched TV, he decided to make a career of it, working for the U.S. importer of a major European auto manufacturer for over 20 years. During that time, Richard held a variety of service and technical positions within the company and even got to tour a few car factories in Europe.

While his career was in full swing, he also dove head-first into the collector car hobby, buying his first collectible, a 1957 Ford Skyliner retractable hardtop, two months after graduating college. A number of domestic and import hobby cars have passed through his hands, but his proudest achievement was his five-year restoration of a 1957 BMW Isetta, which then went on to earn multiple awards at various car shows on the East Coast. You can read all about the Isetta Saga as well as Richard's other automotive adventures at www.richardscarblog.com.

At present, to satisfy his love of anything Italian, he owns a 1967 Alfa Romeo Giulia coupe. On the days when the Alfa is being serviced, he enjoys his first-generation Mazda Miata (but both get stored away during winters). Richard is also passionate about music, especially classic rock and especially the Beatles. He currently works as the Product Training Director at CARiD.com, an aftermarket automotive retailer.