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December 1978 \$1

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THE CONVERTIBLE

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The voice of experience

Buying modern classic cars, for fun and (maybe) profit

By Gary Witzenburg

Ah, romance. But what if you could buy a car that's fun to own and drive, enjoy a few years together with minimum hassle and expense, then sell it for more, perhaps much more than you paid. Ah, profit. Most expensive collector cars were affordable before they caught on.

A sharp two-seater '55 to '57 Thunderbird, for example, that commands a five-figure price today was no big deal back in the early 1960s. Although almost any well-kept older car will increase in value eventually (most Fords, Chevrolets, Cadillacs, Lincolns and Chryslers will do better than others), only a few, very special, desirable models are likely to be the serious collectors' favorites.

The trick is to find a potentially desirable automobile somewhere near the bottom of its value curve. The most likely candidates are cars produced between 1949 (the first all-new postwar models) and 1970, when federal emissions and safety requirements began making automobiles less interesting and more complicated. And, concentrate on cars that can still be bought for around \$5000 or less in good to excellent condition (with parts still available).

There are some easy ground rules:

- Most desirable old cars were highly desirable when they were new—except the Edsel, of course.
- A convertible is nearly always worth much more than a sedan version of the same car.
- A sporty two-door hardtop is next best.
- Limited-production models, especially ultra-luxury versions and limousines, are usually excellent.
- Go for the top-of-the-line model with the largest most powerful engine.

● Stay away from cars that have been customized or altered in any major way, as well as from obviously amateur restoration jobs.

Here's a list of nominees:

GENERAL MOTORS

Buick

- '49 Roadmaster Riviera
- '53-'54 Skylark
- '58 Limited
- '63 Riviera
- '68-'70 GS 400

Cadillac

- '49 Club Coupe
- '55-'60 Eldorado
- '67 Eldorado

Chevrolet

- '55-'57 Bel Air
- '55-'57 Nomad Wagon
- '58 Impala
- '59-'60, '64-'65 El Camino
- '62-'69 Corvair Monza (esp. Turbo)
- '65-'70 SS 396 Chevelle
- '67-'70 Camaro (esp. Z-28)
- '70 Monte Carlo

Oldsmobile

- '49 Deluxe 98 and Wagon
- '49-'50 Futuramic 88
- '66 Toronado
- '68-'70 442

Pontiac

- '49 Streamliner Deluxe Wagon
- '55-'57 Star Chief Wagon
- '58 Bonneville (esp. fuel inj.)
- '64-'70 GTO
- '67-'70 Firebird (esp. T/A)
- '69 Grand Prix

FORD MOTOR CO.

Ford

- '49-'51 Custom Wagon
- '55-'56 Crown Victoria
- '57-'59 Retractable Hardtop
- '58-'66 Thunderbird
- '64-'66 Mustang
- '69-'70 Mustang "Boss"

Lincoln

- '49-'51 Cosmopolitan
- '52-'54 Capri
- '59 Mark IV
- '60 Mark V
- '61-'67 4-Door Convertible
- '69 Mark III Continental

Mercury

- '49 9CM Wagon (Woody)
- '51-'52 Monterey

- '54-'55 Sun Valley
- '67-'70 Cougar (esp. Eliminator)

CHRYSLER CORP.

Chrysler

- '49-'50 New Yorker
- '51-'57 Imperial
- '55-'61 300
- '58-'60 Imperial Custom Ghia Limo

Dodge

- '56-'57 D-500
- '67-'68 Charger
- '70 Dart Swinger 340
- '70 Challenger T/A 340
- '70 Charger Daytona

Plymouth

- '49-'50 Wagon (Woody)
- '51-'52 Cranbrook Belvedere
- '56-'57 Fury
- '70 AAR Cuda 340
- '70 Superbird

Out-of-production models

AMERICAN MOTORS

- '68-'70 AMX
- '69 Rambler Scrambler
- '70 Javelin (Donohue Signature)
- DeSoto**
- '49-'50 Wagon (Woody)
- '55 Sportsman Fireflite
- '56-'57 Adventurer

Edsel

- '58 Citation
- '60 (any)

Hudson

- '49-'52 Commodore
- '51-'54 Hornet

Packard

- '49-'58 (any)

Studebaker

- '56-'64 Hawk
- '62 Gran Turismo

Willys

- '49-'51 Jeepster

Imports

- Alfa Romeo (any)
- Austin Healey Roadster
- MGA
- TR-2, TR-3
- Sunbeam Alpine, Tiger

A MICHIGAN-BASED FREE-LANCER, GARY WITZENBURG OFTEN WRITES ON AUTOMOTIVE SUBJECTS AND IS NOW AT WORK ON A BOOK ABOUT MUSTANGS.