

# Life in the Fast Lane

by Satch Carlson



## Buying Mom a car

I gotta buy my mother a car.

Now, don't get me wrong, it's not that I am sloppily sentimental. In fact, I am the only guy in the country who will admit to a certain estrangement between Dear Old Mom and Her Boy. Actually, we never got along, and we were both much happier when we wound up living 4,000 miles apart.

But Mom was always a car freak.

I suppose that's where I got it. I mean, some of my earliest memories involve cars: Going places in them, or waxing them, or whatever families do that involves automobiles. I learned at a tender age that women are equal to men, in fact, because my mother was an excellent driver. I knew that because she told me.

I never questioned her skill; certainly she had a tendency to drive fast, and as I approached my teens that certainly seemed to be the equivalent of talent. I mean, that's how I wanted to

**'Got a Turnpike Cruiser,' Mom said, 'Passes everything on the road except a gas station.'**

drive! Riding around with other friends' mothers was a lot like riding the school bus: Bo-o-o-ring. And scary, sometimes, too, because in truth some of those ladies seemed totally lost behind the wheel, and they would flounder along until a merciful God steered them into a parking lot somewhere, where we would all get out and kiss the ground.

Anyway, Mom liked cars. The first one I really remember was a '49 Chevy, which she drove until her numbers came up one night on a keno ticket and she bought — brand new, I think — a 1958 Mercury convertible. "Got a Turnpike Cruiser engine in it," she'd say proudly. "Passes everything on the road except a gas station."

In those innocent days, of course, gasoline supplies seemed infinite, and I remember a time when Mom and I for no discernible reason took a two-day drive up from Reno into Idaho and back. (That was the first time I stayed in a motel, also, which was a wonderful new adventure in being a real grown-up; I have never been able to figure out, however, why all motels are built just 15 feet from the railroad tracks.) Mom kept the Merc mostly over 90 MPH, and we had a gay old time frying our brains out in the summer heat and flattening out an alarming population of suicidal jack rabbits.

My brother got the Chevy, by the way, when he turned 16, and I somehow believed that I would be awarded the Mercury when I hit that magic age, especially since by that time Mom had married a character who drove a '59 Caddy Eldorado convertible, a real Hudmobile. (He was a lot like Hud in other ways, too; I don't think Mom went to the movies often enough.) But instead I got a different Mercury, a '53

flat-head V-8 that ran like a stone for the brief time I owned it before the police took it away, my mother having neglected small details like title transfer and license fees.

Anyway, while my automotive lusts were banked and smoldering, waiting for the advent of adulthood and credit, Mom was just getting started. Between husbands she was escorted by a guy who was a cop, and they had a great time driving his '55 Ford Victoria with the police interceptor package. It was also two-tone pink and white, and how those two escaped the clutches of the law is beyond me. Perhaps, being a cop, he knew the secret handshake that negates all tickets. I have never learned the code.

My favorite adventure concerned Mother and a Jaguar. She had hooked up with this neat guy of Mexican persuasion, Roman Sanchez, who (a) taught me to appreciate tacos and enchiladas; (b) taught my older brother to appreciate Dos Equis and tequila; and (c) taught my mother how to drive an XK-140 coupe. (I think it was a coupe. Knowing Mother's penchant for convertibles, I'm surprised that she didn't take a can opener to it.)

Mother took to the Jag in a minute, and it didn't take long for her to be pulled over for blasting through downtown Reno at somewhere around 75 MPH. Roman was with her, and he had done an excellent job of calming down the irate police officer when Mom, her Irish rising behind an important quantity of Tanqueray, climbed out of the 140 and began to tell the officer what he could do with his tickets as well as his motorcycle and who she knew at various levels of the police department.

As I recall, we had to do some serious scraping to bail my mother out of jail. I'm not excusing her irresponsibility, either, though she did seem to live a charmed life behind the wheel. Anyway, she was very contrite when she got out. They may have taken her license away, at least temporarily.

But the next time I saw her, this time in California, she was driving an Oldsmobile. "Carb's got secondaries the size of silver dollars," she said and I hoped she had mended her ways; a car like that could get even her into complicated explanations in a hurry.

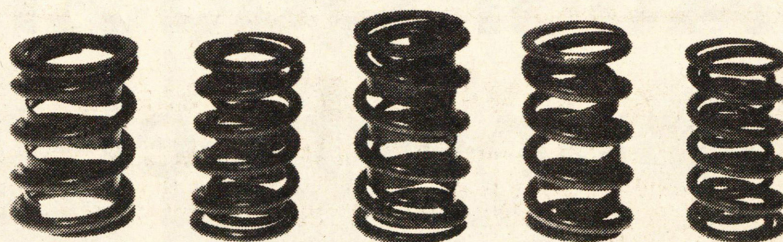
I needn't have worried about the Olds, I guess, because Mother fell upon harder times. The last time I heard from her, after the usual old family gossip and recriminations, she said, "I don't even have a car." I was speechless; I knew what that admission meant to her. It was like a newspaperman saying, "I don't even have a typewriter," or an American teen-ager saying, "I don't even have a TV set."

Ever since, I've been thinking about buying a car for my mother. It would mean more than flowers on Mother's Day, I'll tell you that. I'm trying to figure out something cheap that will get decent mileage, but if it won't do a quarter in 13 seconds flat, she might not even take it.

As an alternative, I've been looking around for a '53 Mercury flat-head V-8. Fair's fair, after all; I'll even pay for the title transfer this time.

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