

Pieces of the Puzzle

Bringing Home Baby

(or, how I got myself into this mess)

By Jeffrey L. Kinzler

What drew me into this hobby? I was a ten year old car enthusiast when I gazed upon the most beautiful car I had ever seen, a 1964 Cadillac Eldorado Convertible. It was metallic gold with a tan top and leather seats. I was fascinated by its lack of fender skirts and its unique, sporty appearance. My first antique car, which I acquired at the age of 16, was a 1931 Model A five-window coupe with a rumble seat. Inscribed on its windshield sun visor were the words "Super Chicken Surf Club," surrounded by psychedelic art work. I bought it from an art student in Valley Stream, New York who intimated to me that driving this car was part of a scheme to appear too nutty to be drafted into the army. This was in 1970. I restored the body of the Model A, had it painted, sold it and went off to college.

Thirty-two years went by. I never forgot the '64 Eldorado. I spent innumerable Friday nights and many, many vacations scanning local classified ads in the hope of finding my dream car. Came close once or twice, but I didn't have the nerve to go through with it. But after passing a landmark birthday, I decided that there were always going to be bills to pay, and either I was going to have it now or never. I found a web site dedicated to 1963 and '64 Cadillacs and learned of a collector in Ohio who had been in search of the perfect '64 Eldorado. This collector had corralled a few '64 Eldos, and might have had one or two for sale. So I called him and he told me of a white one in original condition that he would be willing to part with. So off to Columbus Ohio I went.

The white Eldorado was sitting on a pile of hay in a big barn containing the seller's personal auto museum. Its seats and carpets were removed and its body trim was hanging on overhead hooks. I also saw the rest of his '64 Eldorado collection: a triple black, a green with tan top and a non-original color bronze with a tan top. Each car was complete and in beautiful condition. He also had a '41 convertible sedan, and many other cars, each in mint or show condition.

Before the trip, he mailed me pictures of my car. It was all white, and the interior looked okay in the photos but seemed worse in person. The body was fairly straight, but had surface rust. The underside, which I saw on the owner's lift, looked relatively clean and rust free. In fact I liked the car much more from underneath than from above. But with the seats and carpets out, I could see the true condition of the car and it was honestly represented. I also sat on a milk box and drove it up and down the seller's driveway, hoping not to back into his farmhouse because the plastic back window had grown completely opaque. It was also raining. The side windows were closed, there were holes in the floor and the muffler was leaking. If there was a supreme moment of insanity in my life, this was it.

Did I mention that the commuter jet from LaGuardia shook violently for all but the last five minutes of the flight? Could that explain my temporary brain dysfunction - since I was unable to think rationally about this car once I saw it? (I think I was shaken *and* stirred).



About two weeks later a small van pulled up in front of my house. The driver pulled some ramps out of the back of the van, opened the side doors, undid some straps holding the front suspension, started the engine and backed the "white whale" (as the former owner had called her) off the truck. I was astounded at her beauty as he pulled her up onto my driveway. I immediately purchased a new battery and drove her into the newly cleaned out garage. When my wife came home from work, I backed the Eldo out of the garage to show it to her. ("Look how she starts right up!") As I drove the car back in, it stalled about half way in and refused to start. A wave of panic swept over me. As I sat there, contemplating this 5000 pound, 20-foot long inert mass, foolishly sticking out of my garage for all the neighbors to see, I began having serious doubts about what I had gotten myself into.

My wife and son helped pushed her back inside the garage. I was greatly relieved when we put some gas in the tank from a jerry can and the car started again. The former owner apologetically told me that he let the car idle for a long time when he brought it into town for the trucker to pick it up, and that he probably used up most of the gas.



When bringing your new baby home, it will take some time to learn about her and adjust to her routines. Having an experienced friend or family member around at a stressful time like this is a good idea. Thinking, as I did (or not thinking at all) that you can pick up where you left off - thirty years ago, is unrealistic. And, most of all, remember that with a little practice, patience and a factory shop manual, you soon be enjoying many hours of quality time with your new baby.