

## Have a Story to Tell!

By Stan Andrews



I have owned this 1978 Thunderbird since new. I purchased the car from Rich Ford, a dealer in Albuquerque NM in 1978 and it already had the dealer installed Hurst Hatch T-Top. In the late '70's the T-Top craze was the replacement for the convertible model cars at least in the Southwest for sure. I had a CB radio installed under the dash on the front of the console a week after I bought the car. Again, in the late 1970's this was a must-have in any vehicle. The AM/FM 8 track player had to be replaced in about 1982 when the original caught fire and so a cassette player was installed in its place. As part of my restoration I have re-installed an AM/FM 8 track that works, however, that took about 3 tries before I found one on E-Bay that did work. The interior seats are original vinyl and fabric in camel. However, much of the fabric has been replaced and I have extra fabric stored away for the future. I was able to get the last of a fabric roll from a dealer in Oregon. The steering wheel is still the original but the center bar was replaced with one picked up on E-Bay in better condition. New trunk felt and weather stripping around the trunk and doors has been added as well.

The car has over 160 thousand miles now and after 38 years it has been regulated to going less than 3000 miles a year since 1998. I have had the good fortune of not to have been involved in any crashes that would require body work and coming from the Southwest rust is not a problem either. In 2003 I decided to have the body cleaned up of scratches, door dings, and biff marks. I wanted to keep the Ember Metallic paint so I contacted some local body shops about pricing and looked at the quality of their work and chose a shop who gave me a deal if I could leave the car with them a few weeks and allow them to work as they could. This saved me around \$700 dollars overall, nevertheless, I stopped by at least weekly to check on the car's progress. The shop removed most of the bright work and then painted which saved masking time and touch up according to the shop's owners. My haunting of swap meets and car shows has provided wheel center cones and even an extra turbine style wheel for the car along with dent free wheel opening strips.

I have been replacing mechanical items over recent years but the engine has not been out of the car whereas the transmission has been rebuilt twice. The second tranny rebuild was the result of a poorly done first time where certain parts were installed backwards which caused reverse to fail. I have high regard for scheduled maintenance and think that being proactive can save a lot of down time. The car is the last of the carbureted models and has a 400ci engine. I have found that many parts for the car can still be bought at the local auto parts store but the internet is an unbelievable source for less common parts. I have found too, that certain restoration publications can lead to parts both new and used that may not be available elsewhere. As an example, when replacing the high-altitude type carburetor a few years ago, I called one company advertised in a major restoration magazine who then referred me to the next company and so on until I got the carb.

Considering the life of this car it would be safe to say it is a survivor. In the VTCl South Central Regional Convention for 2011 the car placed first in Touring Class. I also have several trophies from regional car shows since first entering the car in 2004. I had given the car to my oldest son to use while he was away at college,

but after graduation he gave it back after buying his own car and it has remained with me since 1989. My wife does not know me when I have not owned this car. I try to do as much of the repair and maintenance as possible now that I have retired. My garage space and the amount of effort needed have a great deal to do with whether I do the work or it gets done by a local auto shop.