

# Why I Own A Thunderbird

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About a year after I married Faye I found myself, in 1958-1959, sitting on a remote mountain top north of Homer, Alaska at an Air Force radar station for a year without my family. While there, I had picked up an auto magazine that was touting the features and benefits of owning a 1959 Thunderbird. I drooled over those pictures of it for weeks and decide that when I got back home, I was going to buy me one!

So in 1959, I found myself being re-assigned to another radar station outside of Dallas, Texas at Duncanville. I told Faye that I wanted to go check out the new Thunderbirds and wanted to buy one. So we went to a local Ford dealership and I fell more in love with the 1959 Tbird. But Faye said, after looking at the new nearly \$4,000 Tbird that we could not afford to buy a luxury car like the Tbird. She insisted that we needed a car that was more family oriented since we already had one son. What we did not know is that down the line, we would have two more additions to our family, a daughter and another son. Besides, she said we could not afford a \$4,000 car on my 3 striper Air Force pay and what she made working for Sears. So that dream was dashed! We ended up buying a red Falcon, which turned out to be a good move!

Then in 1977-1979 the Tbird bug bit again when the 1977 model came out and I fell in love with that style, and that band over the roof. Once again, my dream was shot down by economics and a practical thinking wife! By this time, I was retired from the Air Force, and was told that we could not afford a Tbird considering my retirement pay and that we did not need a fancy car like that because we still had children at home. So, we settled for a full sized van as I recall, and that dream was put on the back burner... And is still there!

Time went by and eventually, in the mid 90's Faye's health took a turn for the worse, and she was diagnosed as having Ovarian Cancer. That, as many of you know, eventually, after a very hard fight by her and our medical staff, ended up taking her life in 1998. I drifted on through life without the Love Of My Life, meeting some new people along the way. One person lived in Miami and through her, I got to meet a very interesting couple, who own an auto repair shop in Hialeah. Not only does he do auto repairs, but he has been known to build vehicles from scratch. It is my understanding that he built the truck for The Beverly Hillbillies show that was on TV some years ago. He also owns The VW Love Bug, and other cars. For years, his team of mechanics would spend a lot of time on movie sets repairing cars that were wrecked while making movies, and getting them back on the road so they could film again. You can spend hours listening to his stories regarding actors and movie making.

At that time, he was in the process of restoring a blue 1959 Cadillac Coup De Ville for his wife Alice. Since I was into making Microsoft Power Shows (and still am) I told him that if he were to send me the pictures, I would make them a power show that they could show at future car shows. In the course of putting that show together for them, I fell in love with the beauty of the 1959 Caddy Coup De Ville. So I went out to my garage, thinking that it would be great to own one also. I measured my garage and quickly figured out that if I were to buy one of these, about three feet of its tail would be sticking out the garage door! Then the light bulb came on, and I remembered that I had always wanted a 1959 Thunderbird! So, I went to the internet, looked up the length and width of that Tbird and found out one would fit in my garage with about a foot to spare!

So the hunt was on, and since Faye had liked turquoise, I went looking for a '59 Indian Turquoise Tbird with the Turquoise and White interior. I could not find one anywhere. I had already asked my

mechanic buddy that if I found one, would he make a trip with me to check it out and possibly buy it. He was all for that idea. So I kept looking, but could not find one in that color. So I started looking for a yellow one since Faye had liked yellow roses a lot. I quickly found out that the only yellow color for 1959 was called Casino Cream and it was a light yellow color. I did not like it all that well, but decided to concentrate on finding that color since I could not find an available Turquoise one.

Eventually, I found a Casino Cream and White top '59 Tbird in Northern Mississippi. After talking with the owner, looking at pictures of it, and talking with my buddy, I asked if he would like to make the trip with me to check it out. He said yes, and we loaded up my van with a floor jack and 2-3 tool boxes and took off for Northern Mississippi, me prepared to buy it if it looked good. After getting there, we drove it, looked it over pretty good, and my buddy said he thought it was a good car. So I bought it and off we headed back to Texas with it, with him driving it. We got all the way to the west side of Houston, when I got a cell phone call from him, saying that the car had died and he had been barely able to get off the freeway. He decided that the battery was shot and I went looking for a new battery and found one at an Autozone.

I found my way back to the freeway to find a flat bed wrecker loading up my Tbird to get it off the freeway. In Houston, they have a policy that if you break down on the freeway, they will haul you off it at no charge, just to get you out of the way and to keep from causing a possible accident. So the driver got us off the freeway to a parking lot near by, and I told him that I did not know if I could find the Autozone I had gotten the loaner battery from. He told me he knew where it was and for us to follow him, and we did. He took us right to it, off loaded my Tbird, and my buddy went about replacing the battery and checking out the generator system. The details are a little fuzzy now, but I think the generator belt was slipping or had broken and was not charging the battery. He got it all fixed and we got back on the road again to San Antonio, after a 2-3 hour delay. We made it back home with no further problems after that.

One of the first things we did was to take a look at the generator system. We found that the generator bracket was broken in two pieces and was being held on by a bolt and a large washer! He said had he known that, he would not have driven that car like that. We also found a few other things not to our liking, like the windshield wipers not working. Luckily, we did not get into rain coming home. The generator came off, and a good mounting bracket went on to hold a new alternator and that has worked fine ever since. Then we started checking the car out in great detail, fixing things as we found them to be needed fixed.

Of course, a few weeks after I bought my Squarebird, I found a beautiful looking Indian Turquoise '59 Squarebird for sale in Idaho. Or maybe it was Utah. I have forgotten now. My family thought I had bought an ugly looking car with that light yellow paint job and a black and white interior and I had to agree with them. So I started planning on repainting it and re-doing the interior. I settled on a bright yellow, non-OEM color for a '59 Squarebird and a matching yellow and white interior. I had made the decision to customize it to my liking, and modernize it by adding front disc brakes, and a dual master cylinder/dual power booster system under the hood. That was later accomplished.

After considerable conversations and considerations, I decided that I wanted the interior to be done first before the paint job. I figured that if the interior workers scratched the old paint job or caused any damage to it, it was no big deal because it was going to be stripped and painted in the end anyway. My painter assured me that he could cover the interior very well, and keep any paint from getting onto the new interior. He was right, because he covered everything inside and if any paint got on anything at all, it was on the covering and not the material. So the interior work was started, with me doing the design work. I had picked a very well known and respected interior man who has worked on classic and custom cars for years and he did a fantastic job. As he was taking the old interior out, the interior

chrome came off and was being replaced or re-chromed. When he was ready for it, he put all new chrome or cleaned chrome back inside.

I decided that I wanted the '59 Winged Tbird sewn into the center section of the rear seat, and on the front of the seat backs, and onto the door panels. The door panels needed to be re-done because of age and wear and tear. I had him re-design the door panels to reflect a long white wing of the Thunderbird, from the kick panel through the door panel to the wing tip of the rear side panel. If you look at a picture of my door and back panel you will see that white wing. Then I decided to dedicate this '59 Squarebird to Faye by having a long stemmed yellow rose put into the center console. Then I added one to each of the side seat panels so when you open the door you are looking at a long stemmed yellow rose. Then I found a map light for a Squarebird convertible and installed it under the radio. Now, if I am driving at night, I can light up that yellow rose in the center console. Along with the interior re-design came a refurbished steering wheel so that everything inside looks brand new, right down to an electric windshield wiper and new instrument knobs. As an added touch, I had him make white floor mats with a long stemmed yellow rose in them, encased in plastic. When she is not on show, I put my black Tbird rubber mats down for driving. When on show, they go underneath the white show mats. Now it was time for the paint job.

I had decided that I was going to call my '59 Squarebird "The Yellow Rose Of Texas" and even got special plates that said so. So I went about doing the design work on how I wanted the exterior painted, deciding on giving it the Corvette treatment you see on it today. Then I went a step further and had them extend the white paint job of the top to the tops of the doors, around the front window where the air vents are, and behind the rear window. I really wanted to set the top off from the bright yellow metallic, clear coated paint job that was going to go on it. Then I went really wild and asked them to put tail feathers on her by painting the fins white, from the door handles back. That is what you will see on her today. I have received many great comments regarding the paint style and the paint job.

I had decided not to pull the engine and the tranny to paint the engine bay. I wanted to save some money, and time, and I figured, if it ain't broke, don't break anything by taking it all out. So my painter said he could paint the engine well as best he could with the engine in and he did. While the exterior was being painted, all the chrome outside the car came off and went to the chromer. After the painting was completed it was time to put all the chrome back on, including the engine and the external chrome kits. With the bright yellow and white metallic color scheme I think she really stands out now with bright, new chrome. Shortly after she was finished the painters started calling her "Tweety Bird" and that nickname seems to have stuck. Now when she goes on display, "Tweety Bird" and "Sylvester Pussycat", two of Faye's favorites, ride shotgun in the passenger seat. A little guy she found on a trip to Pennsylvania many years ago is the driver.

Since her customization, she has been entered in a good number of car shows. She has been awarded about a dozen or more awards, from anything from 3rd Place to 1st Place and Best In Show. Pictures of her have popped up in various parts of the world! She has been featured in car magazines, and people who know me have sent me pictures of her that they have found in overseas magazines or on the internet. During the Summer heat she is often seen resting on her laurels (tires!) in the garage, waiting for the weather to cool down.

So there you have the story of how I came to own a '59 Thunderbird and about the Caddy and the 1977 Tbird that got away! Pictures are included as attachments.



